



# JOINT CENTER FOR OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

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## Operation Enduring Freedom LESSONS IN CAPABILITIES, VALUES, AND STRATEGY

### IN THIS ISSUE

**Pashtun vs American Values**

**Don't Try to Arrest the Sea: An Alternative Approach for Afghanistan**

**One Tribe at a Time**

**How the Taliban Take a Village**

**Fixing INTEL**

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Cover Photo: US Army Pvt. Matthew Benzing from Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, US Army Europe conducts security over watch during a reconnaissance patrol near Forward Operating Base Mizan, in Zabul province, Afghanistan, on 12 September 2009. DOD photo by Sgt. Kris Eglin, U.S. Army. (Released)

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## Message From the Director

**BG Anthony G. Crutchfield, USA  
Director, JCOA**



This issue of the Joint Center for Operational Analysis (JCOA) Journal is a series of articles focused on the war in Afghanistan. They are provided in order to elicit thought and present ideas that may assist those deployed in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) in completing the task at hand. Several of the articles have been printed in other publications, but, hopefully, this combination of articles will be a useful resource for the reader.

The first article, written by Col Alan Marshall, USAF, presents a comparison of the origins and effects of both American and Pashtun values, and how the two interface in the current effort in Afghanistan. In the paper, Col Marshall proposes ideas on how the differences between the two sets of values can be mitigated through an understanding of these cultural differences by US military members in order to develop trust and build relationships.

The second article, by Major Mehar Omar Khan, Pakistani Army, currently at the US Army Command and General Staff College, gives insight into the culture of the Afghan people and provides opinions on what we and the coalition should, and should not, do to further our efforts in winning the war.

This article is followed by a paper written by an experienced US Army Special Forces officer, Major Jim Gant, titled "One Tribe at a Time." It is based on his extensive experience in Afghanistan and discusses how he was able to build relationships of trust and acceptance with

the tribal leadership. His paper is presented in a multi-part, multi-chapter article, followed by an update article from an interview with Major Gant.

In the article, "How the Taliban Take a Village," Mark Sexton, a Special Forces NCO, who has completed two tours of duty in Afghanistan, gives the reader insight into the process by which the Taliban control local villages. He follows this revelation with a discussion of countering the Taliban efforts in the village in order to win their support and frustrate the Taliban's efforts.

The fifth article in this compilation is the reprint of an article by Major General Flynn (USA), Captain Pottinger (USMC), and Mr. Batchelor (DIA) looking at the challenges in the intelligence community. The article proposes making sweeping changes to the way we focus on intelligence, changing from an enemy based focus to an Afghan people focus.

The final section of this JCOA Journal is the JCOA Products listing that presents a synopsis of each study JCOA has completed and released for public review on our websites.

Anthony G. Crutchfield  
Brigadier General, U.S. Army  
Director, Joint Center for Operational Analysis



## JCOA UPDATE

The process by which the Joint Center for Operational Analysis (JCOA) is tasked is somewhat unique and most definitely unpredictable. Some lessons learned and/or analytical research organizations produce an annual task order at the beginning of each fiscal year, and that task order serves as an outline for the year's study efforts. From our inception in 2003, JCOA has always received its tasking from a variety of sources, through various venues, and at different intervals. Long range, and sometimes short range, planning is almost impossible, but the flexibility at which we operate allows us to redirect and reprioritize efforts as the situation dictates. Taskings normally originate from the 4-star level either through the Commander, United States Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM); a theater commander; the commander of a combatant command (COCOM); or, occasionally, the Joint Staff.

Our efforts during the last few months illustrate the constantly changing issues we focus on and that are once again dictated by the process described above. The Iraq Information Activities (I2A) study requested by GEN Odierno, Commander Multinational Force-Iraq, was completed in September. It has gained a considerable amount of traction throughout the Department of Defense (DOD) to include the Services and other COCOMs. This fall a briefing given to GEN Petraeus, Commander US Central Command, on a civilian casualty incident, resulted in an assignment for JCOA to distribute the lessons learned (LL) from that investigation and to conduct a follow-on effort. Phase I, the distribution of LL, is complete, as is phase II, a comprehensive look at multiple civilian casualty

incidents. Additionally, Gen Mattis, Commander USJFCOM, asked us to study operations in Sri Lanka and Turkey, with each one having a unique set of tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) in which to counter insurgencies. An additional tasking has been received as a result of Gen Mattis' conversation with GEN Odierno, dealing with the transition from counterinsurgency (COIN) to stability operations in Iraq. This study is now in the data collection phase. Meanwhile, as our efforts in Afghanistan increase, there are ideas brewing in support of that theater which could materialize at any time. Engagement and cross talk with the Israeli Defense Force also continue.

In addition to executing these on-going or planned studies, we continue to rigorously integrate our work into doctrine, experimentation, joint and Service training venues, and professional military education courses. As part of the JCOA vision, we are constantly evaluating ways to increase the frequency, quality, and efficiency of our integration efforts. This is where we make a difference.

*"The simple realization that there are other points of view is the beginning of wisdom. Understanding what they are is a great step. The final test is understanding why they are held." --Charles M. Campbell*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce Beville".

Mr. Bruce Beville  
Deputy Director JCOA

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# Journal Contents

<b>Comparison of Pashtun and American Values: Origins and Effects .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Don't Try to Arrest the Sea: An Alternative Approach for Afghanistan .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>One Tribe at a Time .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>How the Taliban Take a Village .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan .....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>JCOA Products List .....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Joint Lessons Learned Points of Contact .....</b>	<b>87</b>

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# Comparison of Pashtun and American Values: Origins and Effects

J. Alan Marshall  
Regent University

**Abstract:** A review of Afghan history sets the stage for an understanding of disparate origins of values between Afghan Pashtuns and American males. Afghanistan has a long history of foreign invaders winning initial success, followed by inability to subdue Pashtuns. This heritage coupled with Islamic prohibitions against befriending non-Muslims generates value conflicts between Pashtuns and foreigners. An ancient code known as Pashtunwali requires Pashtuns to maintain honor by following tenets such as sanctuary, retaliation, and hospitality. Afghan heritage and the demands of Pashtunwali lead to differing values between Pashtuns and Americans working to jointly build an Afghan security force. It is proposed that value origin training is critical to such an endeavor.

This article compares Afghan Pashtun and American value origins, especially with respect to males of military service age. A short review of Afghan history is used to set the stage for an understanding of disparate origins of values for Afghan and American males. An ancient code of honor central to Pashtun value origins is investigated and compared to traditional American values. Finally, a training program for US service members is proposed focusing on Pashtun and American value differences and effects.

A plurality of the population of Afghanistan is Pashtun. Sunni Muslim Pashtuns make up nearly 40 percent of the population with the next largest ethnic group (25 percent) being comprised of Sunni Tajiks (Streissguth, 2006). Afghanistan's eastern neighbor, Pakistan, shares a common ethnic lineage with nearly 10 percent of the Pakistani population also being Pashtun. The majority of the world's Pashtun population resides on either side of the Afghan-Pakistan border (Library of Congress, 2007). The region

of modern day Afghanistan experienced early conquests from foreign invaders such as in 330 BC by Alexander the Great, in 224 AD by the Iranian Sassanian dynasty, and in 637 AD by an Islamic invasion of Arab Muslims (Streissguth, 2006). These conquests left a mixed legacy of Greek, Persian, and Islamic cultures that continues to affect contemporary norms. The strongest of these is the dominance of Islamic adherence with nearly 80 percent of Afghanistan's population being Sunni Muslim and the remaining 20 percent being Shiite Muslim (Streissguth, 2006). One Pashtun value of interest influenced by Islam is the belief that Muslims are "commanded not to befriend Christians, Jews, or non-Muslims (Elass, 2004, p. 146)



**Afghan Tribal Leaders: 07/30/2009 -** US Marine Corps Capt. Andrew Schoenmaker, with 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 3, 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade-Afghanistan, addresses Afghan village elders during a jirga in the Nawa district of Helmand province, Afghanistan, 30 July 2009. A jirga is a meeting held among village elders to discuss and solve any issues and concerns that they may have. The Marines are deployed to support NATO's International Security Assistance Force and will participate in counterinsurgency operations. They will train and mentor Afghan National Security Forces to improve security and stability in the country. (US Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Artur Shvartsberg/Released)

A fourth significant cultural deluge began when Genghis Khan conquered the region in 1221 AD leading to Mongol and nomadic domination until the Durrani Empire of Ahmad Khan in 1747. The Durrani Empire represented the first truly Afghan rule and Ahmad's descendants ruled until the initial invasion of the British in 1836 (Streissguth, 2006). This event began a period known as the Great Game, which was a century and a half long competition for Afghanistan by Britain and Russia. Each of the countries would alternately invade Afghanistan, install a puppet government, and attempt to deny their opponent influence in the region. However, each attempt was characterized by an initial invasion victory, an inability to conquer the Pashtun tribes, and a humiliating retreat (Lloyd, 2006). This pattern created a historic Afghan legacy of expected victory over invaders after initially suffering defeat, and serves as a pragmatic model in any endeavor between Afghans and foreigners. This legacy repeated itself during the Soviet invasion and withdrawal from Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989. It is yet to be determined whether or not the United States is capable of sustaining initial success, or if the Great Game will continue (Streissguth, 2006).

With a basic understanding of Afghan history, an investigation of Pashtun value origins is now possible. Using the Joasian theory combining the concept of a contingent genesis of values with a universalistic conception of morality, a pragmatic framework for establishing Pashtun values relating the right and the good can be attempted (Joas, 2000). According to Newell (1981),

The poverty of most Afghan farmers and herders has imposed an elemental quality on their culture. Values are oriented toward social survival. Loyalty to the primary group ultimately takes precedence over self-assertion, despite the great importance given to personal independence. The conflict between these competing values is a major feature of Afghan life, but in-group loyalty has necessarily played the paramount role in the shaping of attitudes toward fellow Afghans and outsiders. (p. 23)

In combination with the pragmatic expectation that foreign invaders will ultimately be driven out, all actions are weighed against the ultimate "good"

of Afghan autonomy, as well as the requirement to act "right" in relation to ones primary social group. To ensure the proper adherence to the right and the good, a tribal code known as Pashtunwali, or "law of the Pashtuns," evolved amongst the Pashtuns (Streissguth, 2006, p. 29). The first requirement of Pashtunwali is (nang) or honor (Groh, 2007). Basically, a Pashtun man must maintain his honor by observing Pashtunwali at all costs. According to Groh (2007),

The Pashtun's concept of honor is not derived from western society's modern definition of honor, which is based on morality or justice, but rather from a close, unquestionable observance of Pashtunwali. In the past, this difference has created a great deal of tension between Pashtuns and those states attempting to establish their own rule of law. The concept of justice is wrapped up in a Pashtun's maintenance of his honor. Actions which must be taken to preserve honor, but contradict or break the laws of a state would seem perfectly acceptable to a Pashtun. In fact, his honor would demand it. (Groh, p. 16)

Pashtunwali includes three primary tenets: (nanawatai) which demands sanctuary for those who request protection, (badal) which demands retaliation for any insult or loss, and (mailmasti) which demands hospitality to guests (Streissguth, 2006, p. 29). All questions of the greater good and evaluations of right actions are based on Pashtunwali and must comply with sanctuary, retaliation, and hospitality. This explains how Pashtun leaders justified a treacherous massacre in 1839 where 4,500 British soldiers and 12,000 British subjects were coaxed from an outpost under truce, only to be savagely attacked leaving a sole survivor (Streissguth, 2006, p. 62). For a Pashtun male, the deceitful ploy was perfectly acceptable behavior because the Pashtuns of the day were maintaining their honor by expelling invaders and retaliating for previous defeats. Any act by a Pashtun male that would maintain honor or save face would similarly be acceptable, especially if it undermined the befriending of non-Muslims, even though the act would be viewed as dishonorable by western standards. This is what Boudon (2001) described as a Cognitivist Model example "that actions, decisions, and beliefs are meaningful to the actor in the sense that they are perceived by him

as grounded on reasons” (Boudon, p.67). Thus, a Pashtun of fighting age would be a Muslim male (teenage and older), would have little or no formal education (15.7 percent rural male literacy), and would base all moral decisions on the ancient code of Pashtunwali (Library of Congress, 2007).

In comparison, the majority of American military personnel are male (over 80 percent), Caucasian (77 percent), and come from a slightly above average income class. Over 98 percent of American military personnel hold a high school diploma compared to only 75 percent of the general population. American officers universally hold at least a Bachelors degree with most senior officers holding advanced degrees. An over-representation of military members comes from southern states (35 percent compared to 25 percent of the population represented by the other states). Rural members of the military also serve at a disproportionately higher rate than urban members when compared to the ratio of rural to urban citizens in the general population. Thus, at least a plurality of military members could be represented by a southern white male from the middle class, with at least a high school diploma (Kane, 2007).

Such an American representative would have a drastically different value set than the Pashtun males previously discussed. With nearly 77 percent of American adults claiming to be of a Christian faith, a representative American soldier would be raised in a nominal Judeo-Christian environment where the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule would have historically shaped value origins (Census Bureau, 2007). In addition, concepts of integrity and honesty are emphasized in all US military training programs such as the US Air Force Academy’s honor code: “We will not lie, steal, or cheat, nor tolerate anyone among us who does” (USAFA Cadet Honor Code, adopted 1984). Each of the US military service academies has a similar code, and graduates of such institutions would be appalled at any American that displayed “ends justifies the means” values such as those defined by Pashtunwali. Thus, the differences between the

value orientations of Pashtun and American forces serve as a source of misunderstanding and mistrust that can negatively affect US efforts to engage the local Afghan population or build an effective Afghan security force.



**Afghan Elders: 07/30/2009** - Two Afghan elders speak with US Marines from 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment during a civil affairs group patrol in the Nawa district of Helmand province, Afghanistan, 30 July 2009. The men wanted to discuss local infrastructure improvement projects. The Marines are deployed to support NATO's International Security Assistance Force and will participate in counterinsurgency operations. They will train and mentor Afghan National Security Forces to improve security and stability in the country. (US Marine Corps photo by Staff Sgt. William Greeson/Released)

One effect of this is the difficulty American personnel are having in developing an Afghan Air Force. Afghan pilots and maintenance personnel are reluctant to report aircraft maintenance problems because of their fear of being blamed with breaking the equipment. According to US Air Force Col Ruedi Kaspar, chief of the mentorship and training program for the Afghan air service, “You tend to have a culture that doesn’t like to acknowledge [mistakes] and will often try to cover up its mistakes” (Reed, 2007, p. 2). In addition, “Kaspar attributes some of this to an Afghan mind-set that molds the centrally controlled Soviet system with Afghan cultural norms that discourages acknowledging problems for fear of losing face” (Reed, 2007, p. 2). This fear of losing face is a symptomatic behavior of an Afghan male trying to maintain his honor at the expense of honesty.

American males previously described find this sort of behavior extremely dishonorable, especially if trained in the military educational systems. This disconnect is based in differing value systems and might be minimized if both groups had a better understanding of their counterpart's value origins.

To compensate for the effects of value differences, it is recommended that US service members be educated in Muslim and Pashtun value origins. This training should emphasize that Muslims may be reluctant to form close personal relationships with non-Muslims, and that interpersonal transparency will not be as important to Pashtuns as to Americans. In addition, it should be emphasized that actions that would be viewed as dishonorable by western standards may in fact be viewed as honorable by Pashtun standards. Any situation that places an Afghan male in the position to choose between western notions of honesty and Pashtunwali will result in Pashtuns choosing to maintain honor by saving face. It is not enough to teach military members to avoid cultural taboos or to be sensitive to local customs. Americans must understand the origins of Pashtun values and the practical effects those values have on behavior. Such training may be critical to the success of any attempt to create a western style Afghan security force.

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## About the Author:

Colonel Alan Marshall is the Chief of Flying Safety for the United States Air Force Air Combat Command, and was the former Studies and Analysis Division Operations Director, USJFCOM Joint Center for Operational Analysis. He was commissioned in 1987 upon graduation from the United States Air Force Academy, and completed Undergraduate Pilot Training in 1988. Colonel Marshall has had flying assignments in a variety of aircraft to include the T-38, C-141, TG-7, and U-2. From 1997 to 1999, he served as an Assistant Professor of Mathematics at the United States Air Force Academy. Between 2000 -2003, he served as a U-2 Instructor pilot, the Director of Operations, and later the Squadron Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Reconnaissance Squadron. He has also served as the 9<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Wing Chief of Safety and led the office to their designation as the Air Combat Command Wing Safety Office of the Year for 2005. From 2005-2006, Col Marshall was the squadron commander of a combat U-2 flying squadron supporting operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Col Marshall holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Astronautical Engineering and Mathematics from the United States Air Force Academy; a Master of Science (MS) in Applied Mathematics from the University of Washington; and an MS in Aeronautical Sciences from Embry Riddle University. He is currently studying for a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Global Leadership at Regent University, Virginia.

**Afghan Children: 08/01/2009** - Afghan children watch as Afghan National Army soldiers and US Marines with 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment conduct a road reconnaissance patrol in the Nawa district of Helmand province, Afghanistan, 1 August 2009. The Marines are trying to improve transportation for civilians and Afghan National Army soldiers by repairing damaged roads and bridges. The Marines are deployed to support NATO's International Security Assistance Force and will participate in counterinsurgency operations. They will train and mentor Afghan National Security Forces to improve security and stability in the country. (US Marine Corps photo by Staff Sgt. William Greeson/Released)



**Interpreter and Store Owner: 08/01/2009** - A US Marine Corps interpreter assigned to Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment speaks with an Afghan store owner during a census patrol in the Marjan Kalay market in the Nawa district of Helmand province, Afghanistan, 1 August 2009. Marines with 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 3, 2nd Marine 3, 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade-Afghanistan are deployed to support NATO's International Security Assistance Force and will participate in counterinsurgency operations. They will train and mentor Afghan National Security Forces to improve security and stability in the country. (US Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Jeremy Harris/Released)

# Don't Try to Arrest the Sea: An Alternative Approach for Afghanistan

Mehar Omar Khan

Over the last three months that I've spent in the United States, I've heard with concern and trepidation the growing calls for a possible pull out from Afghanistan. No sane citizen of our world, let alone a Pakistani infantry officer who may soon end up being another name on an ever-growing list of the fallen soldiers in the war against terror, enjoys thinking about the painful possibility of our world's greatest military power and history's most inspiring nation retreating in the face of an onslaught by Kalashnikov-wielding bearded barbarians riding on the back of motorcycles, hungry horses and perspiring mules. What is ***being realized*** with increasing intensity is the pain of a seemingly endless and bloody war for almost a decade now; the pressure of a US public opinion that's almost irreversibly weary of war (at least for now); the misery of a mismatch between resources and mandate; the rising groans of despairing allies unwilling to persevere and, the scary scarcity of success stories. However, what ***needs to be realized*** is the fact that abandoning Afghanistan will be an unmitigated tragedy.

For the United States, I believe, Afghanistan is not a case of 'success or failure.' The USA is too big and too powerful to fail against a collection of miserable fanatics holed up in the treacherous mountains of Southern Afghanistan. It's instead a case of *doing too much with too little care and attention*. It's a challenge (still quite surmountable) aggravated by *ditching smart choices and contracting wrong compulsions*.

The current US approach to fixing Afghanistan is impressive in *detail* but seriously flawed in *design*. Despite recent adjustments reflected most profoundly in Gen McChrystal's Counterinsurgency Directive, the ship is still headed for rough seas. The overall design

continues to be based on 'mending and reforming' Afghanistan the country – *as a whole*. The brass-tacks continue to be muddied by unclear strategic intent. The 'reform route' continues to be pursued 'top-down.' Too many coalition personnel and too many international dollars still reside in Kabul or at best in the provincial headquarters. The majority of Afghans continue to stare angrily from the sidelines while a few thugs rule the streets and corridors of Kabul. Too many criminals continue to be respectable and powerful despite being in the neighborhood of so many well-meaning people. While too many US soldiers continue to die, radical *surgery* is still being pended in favor of *cosmetics*.

What is being tried is too much. What needs to be done is *economizing the force and maximizing the effect*. What needs to be done is to increasingly get smarter or leaner in *physics* and more effective and skillful in *chemistry*. What is being done is more and more of *physics*. What is needed is more skill. What is being poured in is more troops. US public opinion is rightly angry about all of this. Why should young men continue to fall for a 'losing cause'?

But is it a case of a 'losing cause' or one of a '*badly managed success*'? I believe it's the latter. And it is with this belief that I want to suggest an alternative approach to what is being done. This approach is embedded in the belief that troops required to manage or govern Afghanistan will never be 'enough' and the right route is 'bottom up' and 'hub to spokes' and not the reverse. I also believe that promise and prosperity is the only magnet that can wean desperate people away from violence and that Afghanistan is too big to be made prosperous all-together. Hence the process of rebuilding and development will have to be 'selective' to start with.

The approach, suggested hereunder, is based on some ‘can’t do’ and some ‘can do’ principles for Afghanistan. The identification of what can be done has to be based on a dispassionate recognition of what can’t be done.

First, therefore, the ‘can’t do’ part:

**Can’t ‘govern’ this country:** It is historically incorrect to call Afghanistan a country or even a *place*. It has always been and is a *people*. Afghanistan represents a people who have always been divided and loosely managed; never properly ‘governed’ at any level even in the loosest sense of that word. Any effort to reverse that historical trend or reality will be a terribly misdirected investment of blood and money. Afghans, vastly ignorant as well as illiterate, have never been clever enough to submit to a central authority. ‘Liberal democracy,’ ‘united vision,’ a ‘social contract,’ ‘tolerant co-existence,’ ‘civil society,’ ‘civil debate,’ ‘national discourse’ – are all misnomers largely tossed around in a small section of expatriate community residing in the West. Hence, even the smartest bunch of people can’t govern this place as a *whole*.

**Can’t ‘protect’ all Afghans:** The emphasis in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Counterinsurgency Directive on ‘protecting the civilians, instead of killing the Taliban’ is unachievable in its entirety. Coalition troops can never reach the numbers necessary to extend adequate protection to the populace across Afghanistan. It will only give an additional propaganda tool to the Taliban, in addition to increasing the range of their target zone. Every suicide bombing will now be seen and portrayed as a sign of the coalition’s failure to deliver on its ‘promise’ of protecting the people. And promises mean a lot in that medieval society. My proposed approach addresses this dilemma.

**Can’t have ‘total’ peace:** In Afghanistan, peace has always been relative – both in time as well as space. In that unfortunate part of the world, ‘peace’ has mostly meant ‘less fighting’ or ‘fighting contained to a few a tribes in a few pockets’ or

‘bloodletting restricted to family feuds.’ Afghans are fatally skillful in digging up reasons to fire and fight. No amount of money, time, or effort can reverse this tragic historical reality in a space of few years. It will instead take sincere national leadership and international commitment spanning generations – something *very hard* to come by.

**Can’t have ‘rivers of milk and honey’ flowing in a few years:** After centuries of war, Afghanistan is now way ‘beyond a quick or economical repair.’ Too much is required to be set right and built anew. Roads, hospitals, schools and colleges - nothing is there. Attitudes, dreams, aspirations, ideals, sense of unity, and a unifying sense of patriotism – again, nothing is there. It’s all broken; shattered by wounds and trauma inflicted by unkind times and endless misery. Brigades of straight-thinking US soldiers with scant support or commitment from Afghan ‘national’ leadership or international community (if there ever were two things by those names) can’t do it in decades, let alone years.

**Can’t do it without Pashtuns:** Like it or not, Afghanistan has always been a Pashtun country. Many as they are though, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Hazaras have always been the ‘outsiders.’ Regardless of who holds the banner (the Taliban or anyone else) Pashtuns will never cease fighting unless given their leadership role in Kabul. They have always shed blood for the defense of their ‘right’ on the throne of Kabul. One can’t mess with that right without incurring serious consequences. What we are facing in Afghanistan is ‘*Pashtun Intifada*.’ It is only ‘led’ by bearded mullahs calling themselves ‘Taliban.’ Take out Taliban and the insurgency will *continue*.

Now what ‘can be’ done:

The list is very short. Don’t try to arrest the sea. Create islands. Having gone well past the phase of breaking the back of Al-Qaeda and dispersing the Taliban, concentrate on ‘*creating and building*’ examples. Set the beacon and you’ll see that all the lost ships and boats will come ashore. Here’s how to do it.

First and foremost, *believe* that it's not God that drives these people crazy; it's poverty. Believe that Pashtuns don't submit to the Taliban out of sheer love for the one-eyed Mullah Omar; it's deprivation and fear that drives this herd to the first man holding the flag of power and promise. Raise your flag higher than the Mullah's and the half-blind lunatic will be devoured by Pashtuns. What is being done is unfortunately not the right way of raising the banner. It defies the logic of 'can't do's' given above. The Pashtun face of the country is not sufficiently visible.

Kabul or the Provincial Reconstruction Teams will NOT work. Provinces are too big a governance laboratory for Afghanistan. Instead, pick a few districts (nothing more than that) in the heart of areas worst-afflicted by the Taliban-led insurgency. Invest heavily in these districts.

Do it in two phases; first craft the message, then two, let the message spread itself.

Here's is how to create the message. In selected (preferably non-contiguous) districts, give them an honest and polished leadership from 'amongst themselves,' a transparent and efficient court, a model Pashtun police heavily armed with both weapons and motivation, schools (separate for girls and boys), a few hospitals, electricity, money for farming, and setting up small businesses through a few efficiently functioning banks, paved roads, a model transport system and, not the least, build a beautiful grand mosque and an FM station that recites Quran with Pashtu translation 24/7. If possible, build a few plants and job-creating projects around mineral mines and informal fire-arms industry. Let these people serve as an example for rest of the Pashtun country. Having created these models, the international community can then work 'upwards' and 'outwards' to include more and more areas and tribes.

Simultaneously the governance, right from district up to Kabul, must be painted with an unmistakable Pashtun color. As of now, Pashtuns are being seen

and treated like Sunnis of Iraq. In reality they are a majority and deserve to be empowered like Shias in Iraq.

A few examples of model districts would unmistakably mean this: that the USA means good and only good; that Islam is not the sole monopoly of Mullah Omar; that Islam and Quran can co-exist with banks and schools and hospitals and businesses; that life without bloodshed is a good life and that what Americans do is better than what Taliban do or plan to do. The approach will give Pashtuns an irresistibly attractive reason to ditch the message and manipulation of the Taliban in addition to stripping Mullah Omar and his Al Qaeda cohorts off their narrative and their manifesto.

Militarily, the coalition must hold fast to these model districts as bases and let the Taliban fester and sulk in the outlying, ungoverned margins. Their lack of ability to give in their areas of influence what the coalition gives in its area of control will delegitimize them in due course of time. This may sound like giving away vast swathes of land to the Taliban. In reality, it means a considerable improvement on the current situation. The Taliban structure of governance stands on a foundation of both fear and promise. The existing effort to pursue them everywhere leaves them surviving everywhere. They thrive on the coalition *chasing* their shadows. This new approach of excluding them from selected pockets will progressively deprive them of targets for violence and an audience for propaganda. Their brutalities in areas without coalition presence will discredit them while doing no harm to the coalition's image. Relative peace in coalition-governed districts will fuel discontent in Taliban-controlled districts. It will also give coalition and Afghan Forces the strategic advantage of operating from the '*interior lines*' instead of having to hopelessly *roll up* the Taliban from the margins to the center.

Such 'model district projects' should not be the responsibility of the USA alone. Other members

of the international community must also partake by taking up a district each.

These islands of peace and prosperity, though small, will be seen by all the lost mariners in the sea (of chaos and cruelty). It is my sincere belief that these model districts will serve as the ‘clarion call.’ Pashtuns, hungry for food and promise, will come running and rally to the cause that gives hope of a better future, of peace and of return to the ‘throne of Kabul.’

#### **About the Author:**

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Major Jim Gant

## A STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS IN AFGHANISTAN

# ONE TRIBE AT A TIME

**MAJOR JIM GANT**

UNITED STATES ARMY SPECIAL FORCES



SECOND EDITION

2 December 2009

## A NOTE TO THE READER

The thoughts and ideas that I will put forward in this paper are mine alone. Although I credit the US Army Special Forces for the training I have received and the trust of its commanders, nothing in this paper reflects the ideas and thinking of any other person or organization.

I am not a professional writer. Any mistakes in formatting, spelling, quoting, etc. are mine alone.

I am not implying by writing this paper that anyone has “got it wrong” or that I have all the right answers. I don’t.

I started writing this paper in January of ’09 prior to the “New Afghanistan Plan.” Much has changed since then. It is an extremely difficult and elusive situation in Afghanistan.

This paper is about tactical employment of small, well-trained units that, when combined with a larger effort, will have positive strategic implications.

The following is a short list of terms you will see in this paper. I will define others as they appear:

**TET** stands for “Tribal Engagement Teams.” I will go into detail about them in Chapter Eight, but they are referred to in many places prior to that.

**TTE** refers to “Tactical Tribal Engagement.”

**TES** refers to “Tribal Engagement Strategy.”

**TSF** refers to “Tribal Security Force.” I will also employ the word *Arbakai* next to it, as this is the Afghan term most used to describe the type of tribal element our TETs would “advise, assist, train and lead.”

I am not here to imply that I think I could win the war in Afghanistan if put in charge. Or that I can meet these challenges alone, or that there aren’t soldiers out there who could do it better. I just know what I have done and what I could do again, if given the chance.

## FIGHT TACTICALLY — THINK STRATEGICALLY

Editor’s Note: This article is reprinted by permission and assistance of Major Jim Gant and Mr. Printer Bowler, Editor ([journals@montana.com](mailto:journals@montana.com)), Missoula, Montana. Their support is greatly appreciated.

## A SOLDIER'S JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

Anytime I receive instruction from anyone, listen to someone speak, or read an article written by someone, my first question always is: Who are you? Why is what you are saying relevant? What is your background? What are your experiences? What are you getting out of what you are doing or saying or selling?

So here are my answers to those questions. What do I consider my greatest military accomplishment? That I and the men I have trained and fought with have won 20 awards for valor. Twenty. That is a truly remarkable number. I had a great ODA (Operational Detachment Alpha) 316 in Afghanistan as part of the 3rd Special Forces Group. We fought together for several years in Afghanistan. We fought in the Konar and Helmand Provinces in early 2003 and again 2004.

I then spent two years on a Special Projects team before returning to Iraq as the first American combat advisor for an Iraqi National Police Quick Reaction Force (QRF) battalion. Our mission was to kill and capture terrorists anywhere in the country. I won a Silver Star and the Iraqi National Police Medal of Honor while fighting alongside my Iraqi brothers in 2006 and 2007 when Iraq was the most dangerous place on earth.

I spent the next two years as an unconventional warfare (UW) instructor in the final phase of Special Forces training. After much red tape I was overjoyed to receive orders to return to Afghanistan in the summer of 2009 to once again spend time with the Afghan people and fight the Taliban. That is when I began writing this paper. A few days before leaving, I was informed that I would not be returning—I would be going to the 1st Armored Division to work on a transition team for a return trip to Iraq.

My experiences since 9/11 have been incredible. I

have fought with great warriors against worthy enemies in both Iraq and Afghanistan. We fought with exceptional bravery and courage at every turn, but we always fought smartly and were always prepared for the challenges we faced.

This paper represents only a small portion of what ODA 316 accomplished in Afghanistan. It's my story of the tribal engagement between myself and Malik Noorafzhal, my team and the rest of his tribe.

We must work first and forever with the tribes, for they are the most important military, political and cultural unit in that country. The tribes are self-contained fighting units who will fight to the death for their tribal family's honor and respect. Their intelligence and battlefield assessments are infallible. Their loyalty to family and friends is beyond question.

My unit and I became family members with Malik Noorafzhal's tribe. This is my story of what we accomplished as a family in mutual respect and purpose. I'm offering our experience as a blueprint for success.

There is no doubt it could be done again.



**MAJOR JIM GANT**  
UNITED STATES ARMY SPECIAL FORCES

We demonstrated month in and month out that a small effective fighting force could unite with an Afghan tribe, become trusted and respected brothers-in-arms with their leaders and families, and make a difference in the US effort in Afghanistan. In doing so, we discovered what I believe to be the seed of enduring success in that country.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS FOR ARTICLE

## PROBLEMS, CHALLENGES, QUESTIONS

### FOREWORD

### INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I	•DEFINING “WIN”	19
CHAPTER II	•WE ARE LOSING IN AFGHANISTAN	20
CHAPTER III	•TRIBES UNDERSTAND PEOPLE, PROTECTION, POWER AND PROJECTION	21
CHAPTER IV	•MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH SITTING BULL AND HIS TRIBE IN KONAR PROVINCE	23
CHAPTER V	•PASHTUNWALI AND ITS TACTICAL APPLICATIONS	31
CHAPTER VI	•SIX PROBLEMS WITH CURRENT COIN STRATEGY	33
CHAPTER VII	•TRIBES AND THE “ENEMY”	37
CHAPTER VIII	•HOW TO ENGAGE THE TRIBES	39
CHAPTER IX	•CLOSING THOUGHTS	50

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

### REFERENCES

UPDATE — STEVEN PRESSFIELD INTERVIEWS MAJOR GANT	54
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## PROBLEMS, CHALLENGES, QUESTIONS

THE FOLLOWING ARE ISSUES BEYOND the scope of this paper that would have to be addressed and dealt with to accomplish the goals set forth in these pages. I cite them in this space, up front, so that the reader understands that I am aware of them and of their importance and difficulty. I will not attempt to address these issues in this paper. The time and research required are simply beyond my pay grade. By themselves these issues demand papers or even books.

Beyond the strategy itself, what has to happen for a Tribal Engagement Strategy (TES) to work?

**1.** A strategy of tribal engagement will require a complete paradigm shift at the highest levels of our military organization—and the ability to push these changes down to group/brigade and battalion commanders. I believe Secretary Gates, Gen. Petraeus and Gen. McChrystal are flexible and forceful enough to embrace a strategy of this type. My fear is that the farther down the “food-chain” it travels, the more it might be resisted by ground commanders.

What specific tactical changes need to happen?

- Command and Control of the Tribal Engagement Teams (TET) would have to be streamlined dramatically. “One radio call could get an answer.”
- The CONOP approval process (used to get missions approved from higher headquarters) has to be streamlined. Some missions might have to be conducted with no approval, due to the time-sensitive nature of the opportunity. The TETs would need special “trust and approval.”
- The risk-averse nature of our current method of operating would have to change. American soldiers would die. Some of them alone, with no support. Some may simply disappear. Everyone has to understand that from the outset.
- TETs must be allowed to be on their own, grow beards, wear local garb, and interact with the tribes-

men at all levels. They must be allowed to be what they are: “American tribesmen.”

- Use of OPFUND (money) needs to be streamlined. The TETs will need special trust to do what is needed with money allocated to help the tribe. Money and guns equal the ultimate power.
- Rules of Engagement (ROE) must change. Using the TETs will become a very intense, personal fight. If they need to drop bombs or pursue an enemy, they must be able to do so. The teams will always fight alongside Tribal Security Forces (TSFs), and no missions will be conducted unilaterally. There will always be an Afghan face on any mission.
- Identifying, attracting and training American personnel who could perform this type of mission would be a daunting task.
- The strategic challenge of Pakistan as a sanctuary, recruiting base and source of funding and military expertise would have to be addressed. The United States cannot afford to destabilize Pakistan any more than it already is. However, a TES (Tribal Engagement Strategy) could positively influence this situation. Most Taliban funding, recruitment and training takes place in Pakistan. Not to mention the safe haven it provides.
- The lack of a viable judicial system. The current government-led judicial system is corrupt, slow and there are too few judges deemed legitimate by the populace to properly impose any rule of law in the vast and largely rural areas of Afghanistan. The Taliban has moved into many of these areas and gained footholds by dispensing justice, adjudicating disputes and acting as judges. It will take decades to improve this situation.
- The warlord issue in Afghanistan. Do we fight them? Pay them? Co-opt them? Use them as surrogates? Advise, assist, and train them like we would do with the tribes? The warlords can definitely be

used in a very effective surrogate role, in support of our objectives. We also need to understand that some fighters whom the US has labeled as “warlords” are really “environmentally-induced leaders” who fill a power vacuum of one type or another and that they would be very receptive to and even desirous of US assistance.

**6.** The opium problem. The tie between opium and the funding of the Taliban is a fact. However, at the tactical level, it would be a mistake for US forces to get involved in this issue. To do so would make enemies out of a population that is simply struggling to feed its families, clans and tribes. The COIN (counterinsurgency) forces should not be made responsible for

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A strategy of tribal engagement will require a complete paradigm shift at the highest levels of our military organization.

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the opium issue. That would be counter-productive for the troops on the ground.

So . . . what is the answer? My hope is that you will find it as you read through this paper. ▶◀



You get a much different perspective on what this war means when you're in a tribal village. You look down at the children and see the hope and trust and anticipation in their eyes. It puts a little more fire in your belly to do something that really matters.

## FOREWORD

**"Even if you take a Pashtun person to paradise by force, he will not go.  
He will go with you only by friendly means."**

—Inam-ur-Rahman, head of the Swat Valley peace committee in Pakistan

**A**FGHANISTAN. I FEEL LIKE I WAS BORN there. The greatest days of my entire life were spent in the Pesch Valley and Musa Qalay and with the great "Sitting Bull" (a tribal leader in the Konar Valley) who you will meet later in these pages.

I love the people and the rich history of Afghanistan. They will give you their last bite of food in the morning and then try and kill you in the evening. A people who, despite their great poverty, are as happy as any American I have ever met. A people who will fight and die for the sake of honor. A great friend and a worthy enemy.

I have been asked by several people inside and outside of the military, "Who is your audience for this paper? What are you trying to accomplish?"

The answer is that I have been trying to get back to Afghanistan for several years, to Konar province, to my old stomping grounds. In June of 2008 I received orders to return there on a transition team. I started this paper as an individual "IPB" or Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield. It began as my attempt to "wrap my brain around" the tribal issues that I knew I and my team would have to face.

I am writing this paper to help myself and possibly others determine how to best utilize the most powerful aspect of Afghan society—the tribes and the tribal system—not only to help the United States accomplish its strategic goals, but to help the Afghan people achieve peace, stability and good governance.

Afghan tribes always have and always will resist any type of foreign intervention in their affairs. This includes a central government located in Kabul, which to them is a million miles away from their problems, a million miles away from their security.

"Democracy" only has a chance to be cultivated at the local level by a small group of men—Tribal Engagement Teams—who are willing to dedicate their lives to the Afghan people and cause.

**The central cultural fact about Afghanistan is that it is constituted of tribes. Not individuals, not Western-style citizens—but tribes and tribesmen.**  
**It is my deep belief—and the thesis of this paper—that the answer to the problems that face the Afghan people, as well as other future threats to US security in the region, will be found in understanding and then helping the tribal system of Afghanistan to flourish.**

At a time when the outcome of the war in Afghanistan hangs in the balance, when high ranking military officers are asking for more troops, I believe the "light footprint" approach put forth in this paper will not only work, but will help to ease the need for larger and larger numbers of US soldiers being deployed to Afghanistan.

I firmly believe that a relatively small number of special officers and non-commissioned officers could

maintain influence on large portions of Afghanistan by advising, assisting, training and leading local tribal security forces (Arkabai) and building strong relationships with the tribes they live alongside.

*One Tribe at a Time* reflects what I believe to be the one strategy that can help both the US and the people of Afghanistan by working directly with their centuries-old tribal system. We can only do this by giving top priority to the most important political, social and military force in Afghanistan—the tribes. We must engage these tribes at a close and personal level with a much deeper cultural understanding than we have ever had before.

When we gain the respect and trust of one tribe, in one area, there will be a domino effect will spread

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Afghan tribes always have and always will resist any type of foreign intervention in their affairs.

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throughout the region and beyond. One tribe will eventually become 25 or even 50 tribes. This can only have a long-term positive effect on the current situation. It is, however, not without pitfalls and difficulty.

But it can and must be done. ▶◀



This is my vehicle after it hit an IED on the night of 24 Nov 2006 during my last tour in Iraq. The explosion flipped it three times and it was on fire when it landed. I was pinned inside and could not get out. I remember thinking, "So this is how it ends..." then I lost consciousness. My Iraqis somehow pulled me out and took care of me. Although I want to go back to Afghanistan so badly, I owe the Iraqis my life—and if they still need me, I feel obligated to go.

## INTRODUCTION

THE US HAS BEEN IN AFGHANISTAN for eight years. We have fought hard and accomplished some good. Tactically, we have not lost a battle. Despite the lethal sophistication of the Improvised Explosive Device (IED) threat, we defeat the Taliban in every engagement. But are we closer to our goals than we were eight years ago? Are the Afghan people closer to a stable way of life? Are we closer to our national strategic objectives there?

Based on my time in Afghanistan—and my study of the region, tribes, counter-insurgency (COIN) and unconventional warfare (UW)—positive momentum in Afghanistan depends on the US force's support for the tribal systems already in place. Take it a step further and “advise, assist, train and lead” tribal security forces (*Arbakais*) much like we have been doing with the Afghanistan National Army (ANA) and Afghanistan National Police (ANP).

I will get into the specifics later in this paper, but what I believe must happen is a tribal movement supported by the US which allows the tribal leaders and the tribes they represent to have access to the local, district, provincial, and national leadership. This process has to be a “bottom-up” approach.

There is no shortage of information detailing Afghan corruption at all levels of government. This directly affects the tribes. If the national government cannot protect “us,” if US forces cannot protect “us,” if we cannot protect ourselves . . . the only answer is to side with the Taliban. How can you blame anyone for that? I would do the same. As we all know, the answers to the problems in Afghanistan and Pakistan have no purely military answer. However, the political strategy of governing from Kabul or fighting the war from there is clearly not working. It never has. More importantly, it never will.

Afghanistan has never had a strong central govern-

ment. A strategy in which the central government is the centerpiece of our counterinsurgency plan is destined to fail. It disenfranchises the very fabric of Afghan society. The tribal system in Afghanistan has taken a brutal beating for several decades. By supporting and giving some power back to the tribes, we can make positive progress in the region once again.

Even the people who advise our national policy-makers see the need to engage the tribes. “The Afghan government is not competent enough to deal with the dire threats that currently face Afghanistan,” says Seth Jones, an analyst at the RAND Corp. who advises the Pentagon. “This means working with tribal leaders.” (Sappenfield, *To Fight Taliban*)

I have fought on the battlefields of both Iraq and Afghanistan. Afghanistan is by far the more difficult and brutal operational environment. The enemy there has never been defeated. Time is on their side. Trust me. I have sat face to face with Afghans, both friends and enemies, who endure unimaginable hardships. They will do it, their children will do it and their children’s children will do it. They own all the time.

When one says “Afghan people” what I believe they are really saying is “tribal member.” Every single Afghan is a part of a tribe and understands how the tribe operates and why. This is key for us to understand. Understanding and operating within the tribal world is the only way we can ever know who our friends and enemies are, how the Afghan people think and what is important to them. Because, above all, they are tribesmen first.

It is a matter of national security that the US government and specifically the military grasp the importance of the tribes, and learn to operate comfortably in a tribal setting. This paper is about *why* and *how* we need to engage the tribal structure present in Afghanistan. ►►

**A strategy in which the central government is the centerpiece of our counterinsurgency plan is destined to fail. It disenfranchises the very fabric of Afghan society.**

# CHAPTER I

## DEFINING “WIN”

We have killed thousands and thousands of the “enemy” in Afghanistan and it clearly has not brought us closer to our objectives there.

We could kill thousands more and still not be any closer five years from now.

EVERYONE TALKS ABOUT “WINNING” in Afghanistan. But what does that mean? The most current definition from President Obama is to, “disrupt, dismantle, and defeat” the terrorist network, al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan. More importantly, the President also added, “and to prevent the return of al-Qaeda in either country in the future.”

Although a topic for another paper, US forces in Afghanistan have accomplished that mission and could continue to do so until our national or political will to stay there runs out—and everyone knows this time is quickly approaching.

We cannot make progress in Afghanistan through a war of attrition or a war of exhaustion. As I have said and will continue to say, time is on their side. In an insurgency, all the insurgents have to do is *not lose*. All they have to do is wear down the will of the counterinsurgent and in this case, the will of the American people and the American politicians.

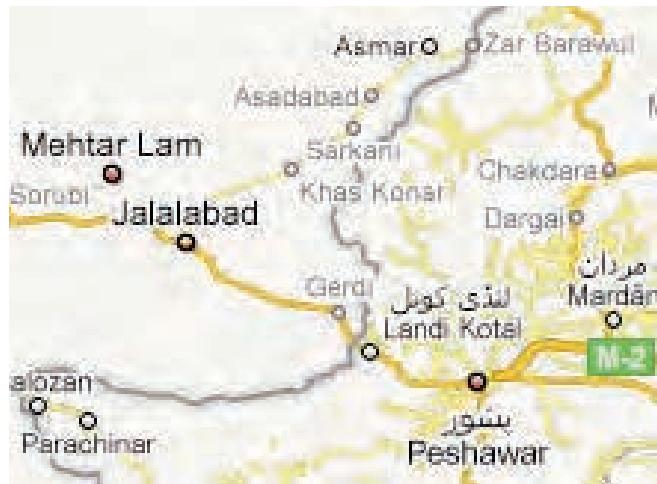
Either approach (attrition or exhaustion) will not work. We have killed thousands and thousands of the “enemy” in Afghanistan and it clearly has not brought us closer to our objectives there. Just as important is the fact that we could kill thousands more and still not be any closer five years from now.

My definition of “success” (that is, “win”) includes the one currently in use. I would add: “... to facilitate security and prosperity for the Afghan people.” In other words, the tribes.

Time is on their side. In an insurgency, all the insurgents have to do is *not lose*.

We will be totally unable to protect the “civilians” in the rural areas of Afghanistan until we partner with the tribes for the long haul. Their tribal systems have been there for centuries and will be there for many more. Why should we fight against not only what they have been accustomed to for centuries, but what works for them? They will not change their tribal ways. And why should they?

**BOTTOM LINE:** “Winning” in Afghanistan will be an elusive prospect until we base our operations within the cultural framework of the tribal systems already in place. ►►



My ODA 316 was based at Asadabad, near the Pakistan border (gray line on map). Many tribal domains in that area straddle the border, making them valuable as intelligence gatherers of Taliban and al-Qaeda activities on both sides of the line—another critical reason to make them our allies.

(© 2009 Google maps)

## CHAPTER II

### WE ARE LOSING THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

THE FORMER MILITARY COMMANDER in charge of Afghanistan, General David McKiernan, said in March 2009, “The coalition is not winning the war against the resurgent Taliban in certain parts of the country.” (Cowell, *US General Says*)

Afghanistan has never had a strong central government and never will. That is a fact that we need to accept, sooner rather than later.

Time and US popular support is the strategic center of gravity (COG) for US forces.

Time and the population of not only Afghanistan but Pakistan is the strategic COG for the Taliban.

Using the old “find out what is important to your enemy and destroy it, and know what is important to you and protect it” won’t work in the current fight in Afghanistan. Make no mistake, the people (or politicians) of the US will get tired of the war and will eventually make the US military pull out.

Time is not on our side considering the current level of blood and treasure that we are expending. A war of exhaustion is unacceptable and a war of annihilation is not feasible. We do not have the patience or the resources to stay on our current course.

The sophistication of Taliban attacks in Afghanistan has risen in the last two years to a point where we can clearly see that they will continue to adapt to our strategies and tactics.

The US also is losing the information battle. We do not get our message out as effectively as the Taliban does. Our “tactical PSYOP” is not responsive enough to make the impact we need at the small unit level.

Recruitment for the Taliban is not waning; it is in fact increasing. The US has killed tens of thousands of “insurgents” in Afghanistan, but we are no closer to victory today than we were in 2002.

Pakistan, and in particular, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the Northwest Frontier Provinces (NWFP) will play a major role in the success or failure of the US counterinsurgency (COIN) effort in Afghanistan, as well as the overall stability of the region. These “ungoverned areas” in Pakistan are among the few areas where al-Qaeda needs to maintain some amount of physical control so they can train and plan in safety. Why is this important? Because these areas are tribal in nature. As I will describe later in the paper, many of the tribes in eastern Afghanistan straddle these border regions. If we can influence the entire tribe on both sides of the border, the US can have greater influence in the entire region.

I like using analogies. If the war in Afghanistan is a boxing match, here’s what’s happening: The US has won every round but has not been able to knock them (Taliban) out. The fight has no limit on the number of rounds that can be fought. We will continue to punish them, but never win the fight. It will go on indefinitely, or until we (the US) grow tired and quit.

The only existing structure that offers governance and security for the Afghan people is at the tribal level. We should leverage this and use it to our advantage—before it is too late.

**BOTTOM-LINE:** We are losing the war in Afghanistan, because, simply put, we are not “winning.” All the Taliban has to do is *not lose*. ►►

We've got the watches, but they've got the time.

—Army saying in Afghanistan

## CHAPTER III

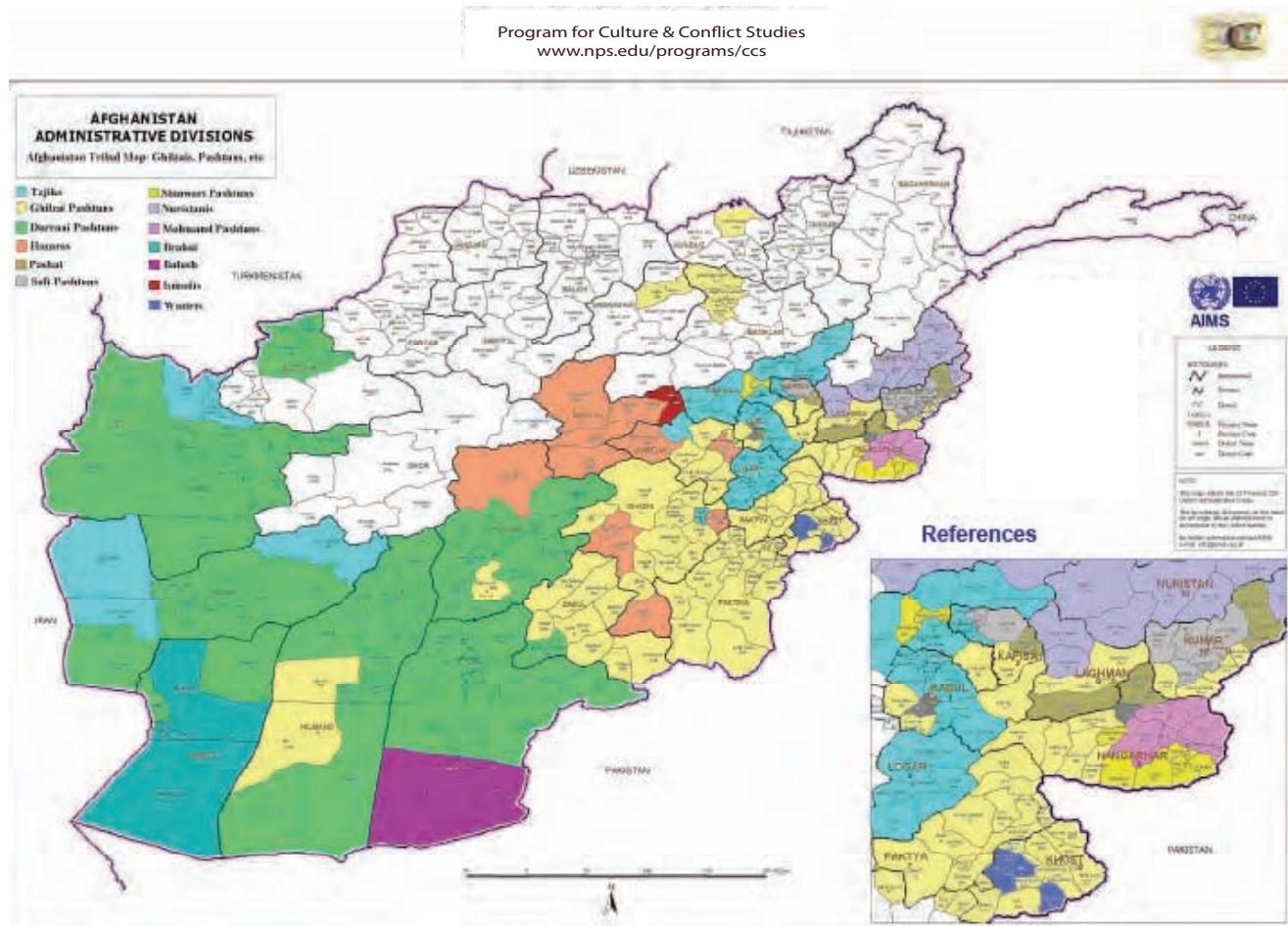
### TRIBES UNDERSTAND PEOPLE, PROTECTION, POWER AND PROJECTION

**F**IRST, TRIBES UNDERSTAND PEOPLE. Being illiterate does not mean unintelligent. Tribesmen are extremely adept at understanding one another and others. As I have preached and preached to the Special Forces officers headed to Afghanistan that I have trained in the unconventional warfare (UW) portion of their training, "You damn well better know yourself, because they know you." The Afghan people have a knack for looking straight through deception and incompetence.

Trust me when I tell you, not only are they as smart as you are, they know they are.

Second, tribes understand protection. Tribes are organized and run to ensure the security of the tribe. Not only physical security, but revenue and land protection. But most important of all is preservation of the tribal name and reputation. Honor is everything in a tribal society. Tribes will fight and die over honor alone (I will speak more about this later). This concept is not understood by a vast majority of strategists who are trying to find solutions to challenges we are facing in Afghanistan.

When honor is at stake, tribal members stop at nothing to preserve their tribe's integrity and "face."



Tribes are the most important aspect of Afghan society and have been for centuries.

Third, tribes understand power. How many guns do we have? How many warriors can I put in the field? Can I protect my tribe? Can I attack others who threaten my tribe? Can I back my words or decisions up with the ability to come down the valley and kill you? Can I keep you from killing me?

Lastly, tribes understand projection. Tribes have no “strategic goals” in the Western sense. Their diplomatic, informational, military, and economic (DIME) priorities are almost without exception in reference to other tribes.

Can I project my power across the valley? Does the tribe across the river know not to come over here and meddle in my affairs? Do the Taliban know that they are not welcome here? Can I influence decisions, either by force or otherwise, outside of my tribe?

Tribes offer their members security, safety, structure and significance. What other institutions do that right now in Afghanistan?

“Tribes,” says RAND Senior Fellow David Ronfeldt in his paper, *Tribes First and Forever*, “can foster a sense of social solidarity. [Belonging to a tribe] fills people with pride and self-respect. It motivates families to protect, welcome and care for each other and to abide by strict rituals that affirm their connections as tribal members to their ancestors, land and deity. This kinship creates trust and loyalty in which one knows and must uphold one’s rights, duties and obligations. What maintains order in a tribe is mutual respect, dignity, pride and honor.”

Tribes by nature are conservative. They hate change and they don’t change. “The more tribal the society, the more resistant it will be to change.” (Ronfeldt, *Tribes First and Forever*, p. 73). The tribal system has been the means of governance in Central Asia for centuries. It has resisted and defeated invaders since Cyrus the Great. The more an alien force tries to change the way tribes live, the more the tribes resist.

**Tribes offer their members security, safety, structure and significance.**  
**What other institutions do that right now in Afghanistan?**

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**“What maintains order in a tribe is not hierarchy and law, but a code that stresses mutual respect, dignity, pride, and honor.”**

—David Ronfeldt, *Tribes First and Forever*

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What about democracy? A tribe is a “natural democracy.” In Afghan *shuras* and *jirgas* (tribal councils), every man’s voice has a chance to be heard. The fact that women and minority groups have no say in the process does not make it less effective nor less of a democracy to them. Asking them to change the way they have always conducted their business through their *jirgas* and *shuras* just does not make sense.

We need to integrate ourselves into the process as trusted “advisors” to the tribal leadership. They need to know that we have their best interests in mind. The strengths that these tribal organizations show can be used eventually to establish cooperation and political integration with the central government (more than likely not our model, but a type). This would take time.

**BOTTOM LINE:** We must support the tribal system because it is the single, unchanging political, social and cultural reality in Afghan society and the one system that all Afghans understand, even if we don’t. We must also remember that the Pashtun tribes are fighting to preserve a centuries old way of life. ►◀

## CHAPTER IV

### MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH A TRIBE IN KONAR PROVINCE

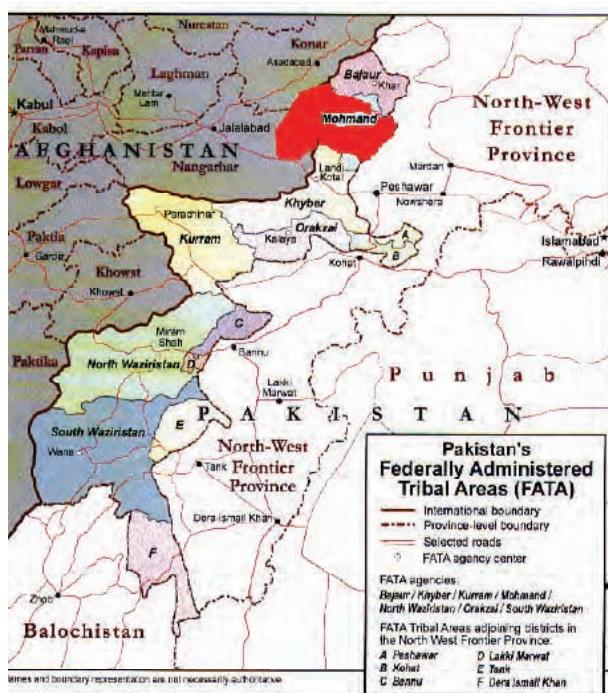
**M**Y ENTIRE PREMISE IS BASED ON my experience with tribal engagement in Konar Province in 2003 with ODA (Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha) 316, of which I was the team leader.

First, I hesitate to write this chapter for purely personal reasons. I have not acted alone. I had a great ODA with outstanding warriors and NCOs. This is not a story about the bravery, valor or camaraderie that we showed every single day—together. This is but one aspect of the overall mission we accomplished as a team. I will only write from my own perspective and will not attempt to speak for any other team members.



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Also, there are aspects of this portion of the mission that cannot be told in this forum for many reasons. I will leave it at that.

A few points before I describe the relationship my men and I built with the village of Mangwel in Konar province:

First, I am unable to tell the entire story for operational reasons that include some of the missions we did together (with the tribes) and some of the tactics, techniques and procedures involved in doing so. I am also concerned about the safety of the tribesmen who helped us so very much.

Second, the trip to and from our MSS (Mission Support Site) or FB (Fire Base) in Asadabad to Mangwel was a life-threatening event. It was a combat patrol that, more often than not, encountered enemy contact somewhere along the way, and in several cases there were multiple contacts.

Third, the tribe offered us outstanding intelligence that allowed us to target both insurgents and terrorists in the area. Their loyalty was with us. Not Afghan forces or US forces, but us.

Lastly, I will only write about a few of the major events that took place. The entire story is a book. The primary point here is that I was able to have “influence without authority” in this area through the tribal leadership and its great leader, whom we came to call “Sitting Bull.”

ODA 316 deployed to Asadabad in Konar province in April of 2003. We got off a helicopter in the middle of the night having nothing but the broad mission statement of “kill and capture anti-coalition mem-

We were safer in Mangwel than we were in our own firebase in Asadabad.

bers." I am not sure that there was an overall plan or strategy for Afghanistan at the time. We were making it up as we went along. The tactical reality was that we were fighting for our lives every single day.

### **Our first encounter with a tribal leader**

The immediate imperative was to get a feel for the area, to gather intelligence and to meet with as many village elders as possible. To accomplish this, I planned to conduct multiple Armed Reconnaissance patrols. Basically we were announcing our presence and inviting contact, friendly or hostile. On our second mission, we were attacked in a well-planned RPG ambush. We fought our way out and moved on to a small village in Khas Khonar, where we were told there was a "problem" in another village called Mangwel. We moved to Mangwel and we were met there by a man named Akhbar, the village doctor.

After some negotiations, the doctor and some of the other elders said they would get their leader. Soon afterward, Malik Noorafzhal came into the



Dr. Akhbar is the first person we met in Mangwel.

I got out my laptop and showed Malik Noorafzhal video footage of the World Trade Center towers collapsing. He had never seen this and it made a deep impression.

compound. I was immediately aware of his presence and the respect that he carried with him. He invited several of my teammates and me in to sit down and drink some tea and talk. I made it a point to relax and put my weapon to the side.

After introducing one another, he asked why we were there. Why had armed Americans come to his country? We spoke for some two hours. I got out my laptop and showed Malik Noorafzhal video footage of the World Trade Center towers collapsing. He had never seen this and it made a deep impression. He had heard about 9/11 and now understood that we were there to fight the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

He then asked me why other US forces had passed through his village but had never stopped to talk with him. I explained that I could not speak for other US soldiers, but only for me and my men.

An important note here: I could feel that he and I were very comfortable with one another soon after we began talking. I spent a lot of time just listening. I spoke only when I thought I understood what had been said. My questions mostly pertained to things he had said, to ensure I had an understanding of what he was intending to say. I had a very good interpreter so this was made easier. The fact that my interpreter was middle-aged, well educated and a Pashtun was invaluable.

The Malik then asked us to stay for lunch, which I immediately agreed to.

After a great lunch, we began to speak again. The Malik spoke about the problems he was having in



Dining with the tribe in Mangwel. I'm sitting second from the left next to my interpreter, across from Scott Gross's nose and Tony Siriwardene to his right. Sitting Bull is standing in the background, smiling.

Afghan food is delicious. For the first several months in Asadabad, the tribe fed us the only fresh vegetables we ever ate. We ate three meals a day with them and never was there a bad one. I was amazed because the people had so little, but they shared the best they had with us. Most often we ate lamb with a spicy pepper sauce, fresh tomatoes and onions. Bread and rice were the main staples. Each meal ended with some type of sweet made of nuts or fruit.

After the second time they fed us, I asked my interpreter if I could pay them for the meal. He told to me I could not do that. I then began to understand *melmastia*, the tribal imperative of hospitality that is used by the Pashtuns. I quickly figured out other ways to "pay" them for their hospitality.

his village. The one that concerned him most was a bad situation within his own tribe. I will not get into the specifics of the different clans and sub-clans but there was a "highland" people and a "lowland" people. Noorafzhal's tribe included people whose physical location is on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The highland people had taken and were using some land that belonged to the lowland people. The Malik told me the land had been given to his tribe by the "King Of Afghanistan" many, many years ago and that he would show me the papers.

I told him he didn't need to show me any papers. His word was enough.

He then told me he had given the highlanders 10 days to comply with the request or he and his men would retake it by force. Here was the critical point for me and my relationship with Malik Noorafzhal.

It is hard on paper to explain the seriousness of the situation and the complexity we both were facing. He had asked for help, a thing he later would tell me was hard for him to do (especially from an outsider) and I had many options. Could I afford to get involved in internal tribal warfare? What were the consequences if I did? With the tribe? With the other tribes in the area? With my own chain of command?

I made the decision to support him. "Malik, I am with you. My men and I will go with you and speak with the highlanders again. If they do not turn the land back over to you, we will fight with you against them." With that, a relationship was born. Malik Noorafzhal then told me he had only eight warriors on duty at the current time. I told him, "No, you have sixteen." (I had eight team members at the time).

We talked for hours, discussing what next steps to take. Then, out of the blue the Malik leaned over and told my interpreter to tell me that he had not been completely honest, that he had not eight, but 80 warriors. I looked back at the Malik, smiled and nodded my head in approval.

A lot more tea was drunk and a lot more information was exchanged, none of which I can talk about

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**"Jim, the last time I saw a person with a face like yours [white] the Russians killed 86 men, women and children of my village. . . . They never took my village. We are ready to fight again if we have to. You have great warriors with you. We will fight together."**

—Malik Noorafzhal (Sitting Bull)

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but all of which went toward deepening the bond between ODA 316 and the Malik and his tribe. It was getting late. Noorafzhal told my interpreter that he needed to speak with me alone, outside. He took my hand, looked me in the eye and said, "Commander Jim, I have 800 warriors and they are at your disposal. You only need to ask and they will be yours."

From eight to eighty to eight hundred. Without going into further detail, suffice it to say that the dispute with the highlanders was resolved. And we of ODA 316 had learned two lessons about Tribal Engagement that, if anything, are more important today than they were then.

We saw firsthand the depth and power of the existing (though invisible to us) tribal defense system. And we grasped the absolute necessity of working with and bonding with the tribal leader—man-to-man, warrior-to-warrior.

#### **We bond with the village, "one tribe to another"**

Maybe a Special Forces ODA can understand an Afghan tribe because we ourselves are a tribe. And the Afghans recognize this. As time went by and we fought in many ambushes and engagements throughout the river valley and around other villages, the tribe came to believe that we were on their side and that we had come to help. With this, they began to open up to us. Here's one example:

Our team was in Mangwel. Malik Noorafzhal asked us to stay the night as we had many topics to discuss. Was this safe? I quickly counted over sixty armed warriors providing security. There were sentries high in the mountains (on the Pakistani side) that we were not meant to see, and three layers of security near the Malik's compound. We set up a hasty defensive perimeter (HDP) with our vehicles and got settled. The Malik then approached me and said he wanted to take me somewhere very special.

I, of course, agreed. I grabbed three of my men, we got in several pick-up trucks with Malik Noorafzhal and his men, and began traveling up towards the beautiful mountain range behind Mangwel (with just weapons, no body armor) towards Pakistan. We drove up a valley and past an Afghan cemetery with many large flat rocks emplaced into the ground. We noticed many graves. Off in the distance, what appeared to be an old village had been destroyed.

The vehicles parked and we all got out. Malik Noorafzhal grabbed my hand and we walked hand in hand up a small valley into the mountains. We turned at a small bend and there was a beautiful waterfall. He told us to drink the water.

He then came next to me and said (through my interpreter), "Jim, the last time I saw a person with a face like yours (meaning white) the Russians killed 86 men, women and children of my village."

He continued, "This is my old village. We fought the Russians. They never took my village. We are ready to fight again if we have to." He looked at me and finished with, "You have great warriors with you. We will fight together."

We stood there for a few minutes and looked back into the valley, where you could see the old village and the new one. It was a remarkable moment that cannot be put into any metrics or computer program that defines "success" today. But it was. The bond continued to grow.

Below is a photo that captured that moment, as we were about to leave.



This was taken just before Sitting Bull took me up to "Old Mangwel," his old village the Russians had destroyed. Fifth from the left is Sitting Bull holding my M-4 with me at his side. My team member standing is SFC Travis Weitzel. Kneeling in front of me is SFC Mark Read and far right kneeling is SFC Scott Gross. We handed our weapons over to them for the photo.

It was also this night where, in great detail, I explained to Malik Noorafzhal why we referred to him as "Sitting Bull." He was not only captivated by the story of this great American Indian warrior and leader of his people, but it was a great honor to him that we viewed him in that way.

I want to interject a couple of situations that might also tell of the relationship that was built with Malik Noorafzhal and my team. He and Dr. Akbhar were very open with their homes and families. I spent countless hours playing with Dr. Akhbar's small children and the Malik's grandchildren and great grandchildren. The Malik used to say to me, "Jim, I am getting too old. Play with the children today. They love you." So do you know what my primary task would be for the day? I would play with the children—for hours.

The little girls and I would walk around the village holding hands and laughing at "stuff." They would teach me Pashto and I would teach them English. We would be watched by literally hundreds of younger

children and women as we played. I often thought that these play sessions did more for our cause in the Konar than all the raids we did combined.

Another very enjoyable, insightful and important part of our conversations was discussing the war



Their families became our families.



Playing with the kids. A lot of trust was built between my team and the tribe by the way we treated their children.

against the Soviets with the Malik and his men. I cannot tell you how much I enjoyed it and learned from it. The tribesmen loved to explain in detail, to us and in front of each other, their great exploits on the battlefield against "the Bear."



One of Sitting Bull's mujahadeen commanders describes ambush tactics they used against the Soviets. I loved these sessions and I learned a lot. The tribesmen enjoyed being able to tell us stories of their great battles.

My men developed their own personal and professional relationships with the people. Each one had his own following. When we would drive up to the village, different sets of children, young people and elders would run up to different members of the team calling them by name.

Here is a brief quote from Captain Dan McKone, my medic and gunner during my time in the Konar. He has won three awards for valor. No warrior understands Afghanistan better than he does. (He is there now advising the ANA):

Mangwel was a high point in my time as a soldier, no doubt. Our team's (ODA 316) ability to connect and establish a relationship based on friendship and trust has yet to be replicated . . . and it sounds like the Army is not going to try it again. I remember strongly, that for me, I felt that we wanted to develop cooperation, not dependence. This was very true for me and my relationship with Dr. Akhbar. We, as a team, wanted to support him and, of course, through him add to Sitting Bull's ability to provide for his people more than just promises, to show concrete dividends for having a positive friendship with an outside force. As Dr. Akhbar ran a for-profit clinic in the village, and appeared to have credibility as the village doctor, we could not do anything to undercut his credibility, or his ability to make a living. How things would have panned out over a longer period of time would have been great to see. Alas, it was not to be.



Then SSG McKone's relationship with Dr. Akhbar was a key to our team's success in Mangwel. Dan's now a captain and winner of three awards for valor.



In between our Armed Reconnaissance patrols and operations with Sitting Bull's warriors, we experienced the exact opposite of war with the tribe's children. In short, they loved us and we loved them. A big bright spot was when several hundred dollars worth of toys arrived from my wife and other members of my team's families. It was a happy holiday for the kids and everyone else in the village. The smiles on their faces made us all the more honored to be there. I'm in the top photo with Sitting Bull and a happy girl. Below, my team and I were at the girls' school handing out much needed supplies.



## Not all fun and games

While all of this was going on, we were getting an amazing amount of actionable intelligence from Malik Noorafzhal's intelligence people, his *kasheeka*. We received a lot of information from locals at our firebase on a daily basis, but most of it was worthless. The information we got from Malik Noorafzhal and his men was correct 100 percent of the time. Their intelligence nets and early-warning systems were superior.

For example, my ODA was engaged in a significant enemy contact in the late evening in the summer of 2003 in the Pesch Valley, about 25 kilometers north of our firebase and 60 kilometers from Mangwel. The very next morning at around 0800, Dr. Akhbar and several others elders came to our firebase to check on us as they had heard we were attacked.

When I asked them how they had found out, they simply answered, "Word travels quickly here."

## My biggest regret

Over time, it became very clear that the relationship we had built with the tribe was causing them to become a target for HIG [warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's armed party, Hezb-e Islami] in the area. We



Dr. Akhbar and a few tribal members came to check up on us after our firebase came under attack the night before.

could not stay in the village 24 hours a day due to our other mission requirements. In retrospect and with many more years of experience under my belt, not setting up our base in Mangwel was a mistake.

Since we could not maintain a 24-hour presence in the village (which they had asked for on two separate occasions), I decided to give them as many weapons and as much ammo as I could get my hands on. I felt like not only was it the best thing to do, but the moral thing to do as well. I had asked them to risk so much—what else was I supposed to do?

I am comfortable with the decision for two reasons. First, the tribe needed more weapons to help defend themselves and, more importantly, Malik Noorafzhal and his people viewed these weapons as great gifts. These were gifts not only of honor but trust as well. These gifts bound us together even more than we already were. Power in this area was about the ability to put armed men on the ground to attack an adversary or defend their tribe. Guns were the ultimate currency.

A principal tenet of the *One Tribe at a Time* concept is that US Tribal Engagement Teams "advise, assist, train and lead" the tribal forces they are paired with. Under "assist," we need to add "arm and supply." I will have more to say about this in Chapter VIII: How to engage the tribes.

The last time we visited Mangwel, Sitting Bill and Dr. Akhbar's wives gave me beautiful, hand-made jewelry to specifically give to my wife and daughter. As they handed me these gifts, they told me, "Thank you for what you have done for us. Thank your wife for sending our children gifts." The jewelry is beautiful, but what it represents means the most.

**BOTTOM LINE:** We were safer in Mangwel than on our own firebase. The relationships we built there are still reaping dividends in the Konar region, more than six years after we left.

See "Gifts of Honor" on Steven Pressfield's web site at <http://blog.stevenpressfield.com>. ►►

## CHAPTER V

### PASHTUNWALI AND ITS TACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Pashtunwali is the code of honor the Pashtun tribes live by. Understanding it is crucial if one is going to learn about or become part of a Pashtun tribe.

**T**HE LAW, AS WE UNDERSTAND IT in the West, is not the basis for tribal societies. That function is performed by a code of honor. It has been my experience that many Western soldiers—officers and NCOs alike—do not perceive or understand “honor” as an Afghan does. Most Americans view honor as a mixture of honesty, integrity, respect, fairness and loyalty to one’s country. In many ways the tribesmen I have dealt with think of honor in similar terms—as loyalty, courage, the ability to defend themselves, their families and their tribal communities.

But the tribesman is less concerned about “country”—which for him is almost irrelevant—and more concerned about protecting the domain of his family, his customs, his tribal leadership, his warrior pride. He lives in a regional world where day-to-day military strength means the difference between survival and being overrun by other tribal elements whoever they might be (the Taliban, other aggressive tribes, or the Russian army).

There is no larger government force available to intervene and protect him when his tribe is in danger.

“Thus, warlords and warriors fighting in Afghanistan, Iraq and other tribal zones today are renowned for the value they place on upholding codes of honor and avoiding shameful humiliation. All want to gain honor for themselves and their lineage, clan and tribe. No one can afford to lose face, for that would reflect badly not only on them as individuals but also their kin. If the word were in the dictionary, it might be said that tribes and clans are deeply honoritarian.” (*Tribes First and Forever*, Ronfeldt, p. 35)

A “warrior code” is the centerpiece of the majority of tribal men, young and old, that I have known on a personal level. This code and their conception of honor is the tribe’s collective center of gravity, as well as each individual’s.

Sitting Bull and I often spoke of warriors. ODA 316 and I had proved ourselves in combat to them. It was this ability and opportunity to prove our physical courage to the tribesman that made them truly respect us.

The only other aspects of Pashtunwali I will mention are revenge (*badal*) and hospitality (*melmastia*). The revenge aspect of the tribe in Mangwel was a real and tangible issue. It was interesting to me that this revenge aspect could be put into motion by the mere perception of challenging the tribe’s honor or name. When, at one point, members of Hezb-e Islami (HIG) accused Malik Noorafzhal of letting Christianity be spread in his village, we both knew and understood this was a lie. However, it was the issue of his tribe’s honor that caused our combined reaction of violence towards HIG.

“Principles of mutual respect, dignity, pride, and honor are so important in tribal societies that humiliating insults may upset peace and order more than anything else. An insult to an individual is normally regarded as an insult to all who belong to that lineage. Then there are only two ways to alleviate the sense of injury: compensation or revenge. And a call for compensation or revenge may apply not just to the offering individual but to his or her lineage. Responsibility is collective, and justice is less about inflicting punishment for a crime than about gaining adequate

compensation or revenge to restore honor. It is not unusual to find clans and tribes engaged in prolonged cycles of reconciliation and revenge; i.e., fusion and fission deriving from insults that happened long ago." (*Tribes First and Forever*, Ronfeldt p. 39)

I would also be remiss if I did not mention the simply remarkable hospitality that we were shown every single time we visited Mangwel. The people always gave the very best of everything they had. They treated us with respect, dignity, and honor in every way, every single time we were together.

"The tribal form, at its best, embodies high ideals about how a society should be organized and how people should treat each other. Today, as in ancient times, social ideals about egalitarianism, mutual caring, sharing, reciprocity, collective responsibility, group solidarity, family, community, civility, and democracy all hark back to tribal principles." (*Tribes First and Forever*, Ronfeldt p. 59)

The honor of an Afghan woman can never be compromised. It sounds contrary to how they treat their women, but that is the point. Their world is one of contradictions (to outsiders) and is very hard to understand.

A personal point on this. I was invited inside the inner rooms of compounds in Mangwel on two occasions. Both times I was presented with gifts from the wives of two separate village elders. Neither time was even my interpreter allowed to go inside. Both times the wife was uncovered and personally handed me the gifts to give to my own wife and daughter.

### **Hearts and Minds vs. Shame and Honor**

Pashtunwali has a definite effect on the tactics, techniques and procedures used, not only to fight the insurgency but to get the local population on our side. The Pashtun tribes will fight any and all outsiders, and refuse to accept being ruled by a central government.

An important tribal concept that the Tribal Engagement Teams must internalize is: "Hearts and Minds vs. Shame and Honor."

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A "warrior code" is the centerpiece of the majority of tribal men, young and old, that I have known on a personal level. This code and their conception of honor is the tribe's collective center of gravity, as well as each individual's.  
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The Pashtun can go from brother to mortal enemy—in 60 seconds. It is one of the things I respect and enjoy most about the Pashtun culture.

It is also important to remember that most of the insurgents are Pashtuns. In many cases the Taliban rule of law (Shar'ia law) is in direct conflict with Pashtunwali. We currently are not using this to our advantage.

Ask a Pashtun what comes first, Islam or Pashtunwali, and he will invariably answer: "Pashtunwali." (Malkasian and Meyerle, *Difference in Al-Anbar*)

"The Pashtun people are unusual in the sense that they will willingly do things if asked respectfully, but will refuse point-blank if ordered to do so or threatened by force. Bombings and missile strikes won't force them to beg for mercy or cooperate with their attackers. They are made of sterner stuff. Their patience is endless and is born out by their suffering during the past three decades." (Yusufzai, *Help the Pashtuns, News International*)

**BOTTOM LINE:** A thorough and deep understanding and respect for Pashtunwali is critical for the success of US Tribal Engagement Teams and the overall US strategy in Afghanistan. ►•

## CHAPTER VI

### SIX PROBLEMS WITH CURRENT COIN STRATEGY AND ITS APPLICATION IN AFGHANISTAN

RAND RECENTLY PUBLISHED A detailed and informative book, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, by Seth Jones. It includes an analysis of 90 insurgencies since 1945. The study identifies three major variables correlated with the success and failure of counterinsurgency efforts.

- Capability of indigenous security forces, especially police
- Local governance
- External support for insurgents, including sanctuary

David Kilcullen has echoed this in a White House briefing in 2008. The Taliban, he declared, has out-fought and out-thought us on all three critical fronts: "We have failed to secure the Afghan people. We have failed to deal with the sanctuary in Pakistan. The Afghan government does not deliver legitimate, good governance to Afghans at the local level." (*Interesting Times*, November 14, 2008, Kilcullen, email Q & A session)

#### What we're doing now

Counterinsurgency strategy is rightly predicated on this primary objective: to "secure the population where they sleep." But how?

Right now, this effort has come entirely from the Kabul government, either through US forces or through the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP)

"The development of Afghan Security Forces has been a badly managed, grossly understaffed and

poorly funded mess," says Anthony Cordesman, analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. (*Obama's Vietnam*, *Newsweek*, Moreau, Yousafzai, p. 33).

Current policy is to pour more time, money and resources into the ANA and ANP. We have been doing this for eight years now and what do we have? The ANA and ANP are symbols of the central government, which at present is not trusted by the tribes.

Yet we continue to stake the success of our mission on their development. We should continue to develop the will and capacity of the ANA and ANP, while simultaneously preparing the tribes to defend themselves.

As Defense Secretary Robert Gates recently said, "My worry is that the Afghans come to see us as part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. And then we are lost." (*Obama's Vietnam*, *Newsweek*, Moreau, Yousafzai, p. 32.)

The current program to train Afghan police is under-staffed, under-resourced and full of corruption. Most importantly, the tribes' reluctance to accept any outside influence automatically qualifies them as one of the few viable options available to protect the population. Why continue to work against the tribal structures and traditions already in place? Not only let the tribes protect themselves, but encourage it.

#### How a Tribal Engagement Strategy (TES) provides security

Following the "Clear - Hold - Build" model, a small number of US TETs (Tribal Engagement Teams)—

"A man with a gun rules a hundred without one." –Vladimir Lenin

given enough time to train a Tribal Security Force (TSF) and the ability to call for US air support and aerial re-supply and a US Quick Reaction Force in an emergency—could conduct the “hold and build” portion of this strategy with a very limited footprint.

We are talking about the tribes providing security for themselves, with the assistance of US Tribal Engagement Teams.

Security at the local (tribal) level is the key to security and support at the national level. No political change will ever take place without true security at the tribal level. A Tribal Engagement Strategy can help do that.

“We should consider how our counterinsurgency strategies and policies might include non-state groups in a civilian policing role. Scholars and analysts have observed that ‘third forces’—militias, private military companies, and even criminal organizations—can sometimes be opted to play useful counterinsurgency roles. These irregular forces might be induced to provide police-like protection to the civilian population.” (Rosenu, Low Cost Trigger Pullers, p. 22)

“If it is accepted that a major problem of the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan is the ability to control the villages, a logical conclusion would be that the formation of village militias is necessary.” (Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop, Giuszotti, p. 173)

Tribal militias also would inhibit the Taliban’s ability to attack tribal members (the TSFs/*Arbakai*). With our Tribal Engagement Team (TET) support, the tribes could retaliate in strength against the Taliban.

Training and building relationships with the leaders of the tribe will be permanent fixes in large areas of rural Afghanistan. We will be able to stay there for the long haul with very little support once the

systems are in place and the Tribal Security Forces (*Arbakai*) are well-trained and we have gained their trust. Trust in the tribe I worked with in Mangwel was worth everything.

### **How A Tribal Engagement Strategy promotes good governance**

The natural governance of Afghanistan is tribal. Through its councils, *jirgas* and *shuras*, tribal members have been dispensing justice and providing the means of conflict resolution for centuries. However, such traditional tribal mechanisms have been weakened by brutal and deliberate campaigns of assassination, intimidation and co-optation—first by the Soviets, then the warlords, now by the Taliban.

“No one is currently doing the job of actual policing and enforcing the rule of law, keeping the population safe from all comers—including friendly fire and coalition operations, providing justice and dispute resolution, and civil and criminal law enforcement. (*Interesting Times*, November 14, 2008, Kilcullen, email Q & A session).

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**The natural governance of Afghanistan is tribal. Through its councils, *jirgas* and *shuras*, tribal members have been dispensing justice and providing the means of conflict resolution for centuries.**

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Tribal Security Forces could do this through the tribal *jirga* system, beneath the authority of a tribal council and backed up by a Tribal Engagement Team to bring US resources, leadership and training to bear. Together with the tribal elders, they can act as peacemakers and brokers, bringing the important actors to negotiate.

These traditional institutions can facilitate justice and legitimacy through a local approach to resolving conflicts.

The Taliban know this, even if we don’t. They have been working in the villages for years to establish “shadow governments” of Sharia law courts and other indigenous institutions, providing the justice and fair

The Taliban . . . have been working in the villages for years to establish “shadow governments” of Sharia law courts and other indigenous institutions, providing the justice and fair play that the villagers cannot get from a remote and corrupt national government.

play that the villagers cannot get from a remote and corrupt national government.

“On a national scale, we are not going to win hearts or change minds. This must be done on the ground, person-to-person, by gaining respect and trust with each tribe. In other words, we need to employ a Tactical Engagement Strategy, one tribe at a time. Study and gain a detailed appreciation of Pashtunwali, the honor code of the Pashtuns, in order to communicate effectively, whether kinetic or non-kinetic, within the target audience’s cultural frame of reference.” (William McCallister, *Operations in Pakistan’s Tribal Areas*)

Speaking of Iraq, Carter Malkasian and Jerry Meyerle state, “Another way to reduce government misrule could be . . . to empower traditional tribal structures that may be more representative and have greater authority on the ground.

“In Afghanistan, tribes are even more important. Most Pashtuns identify themselves first and forever with their tribe, sub-tribe, or clan. Competing political institutions and figures are much weaker and most of the population lives in rural areas, far from government institutions.” (Malkasian and Meyerle, *How is Afghanistan different from al-Anbar?*)

**“Unless you are confident in the ability of your government to enforce its peace, then the man with a gun at your door at midnight is your master.”**

—Justin Kelly, *How to win in Afghanistan*

Another major COIN tenet is to separate the insurgent from the population. The presence of the Tribal Engagement Teams would facilitate this very quickly. Once the TETs were on the ground with the tribal leadership, insurgent elements would either be killed or have to leave the area. The presence of the TETs would also make it difficult for the local Taliban supporters to be mobilized when the Taliban wanted to surge in certain areas.

Local Taliban fighters would be much more inclined to re-integrate into the tribe once the TSFs (*Arbakai*) start to be implemented. Which low-level Taliban members could re-integrate would, of course, be up to the tribal leadership.

Good governance is the follow-on to reliable security. Tribal Security Forces can facilitate both. “Unless you are confident in the ability of your government to enforce its peace, then the man with a gun at your door at midnight is your master.” (Kelly, *How to win in Afghanistan*, Quadrant on-line, p. 5)

### **How a Tribal Engagement Strategy interdicts external support for insurgents**

The safe-haven issue in the eastern and southern portion of Afghanistan is a huge factor that could potentially cause the failure of the entire campaign. From my own experience, the location and demographics of the village of Mangwel and members of the tribe located there make this a situation where we could and did acquire much more intelligence to make more informed decisions in that region.

Given enough time, effort and resources, a Tribal Engagement Strategy could be expanded to the entire border region, not only policing the infiltration routes from Pakistan (which the tribesmen know as intimately as we know the streets of our own hometown), but providing actionable intelligence about who has crossed over, where they are, and what potential danger they represent.

## Putting US soldiers (TETs) on the ground with the tribes will say more about our commitment than anything else we can do.

"US military operations most succeeded when leaders at the small-unit level had enough leeway, specialized assets, and firepower to engage the population and develop their own intelligence. Indeed, US military doctrine needs to establish far looser and more broadly distributed networks that have a high degree of independence and survivability. (Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, p. 98)

The RAND study also points out four more reasons to depend on indigenous actors to fight the war:

1. Most insurgencies have taken between 11 to 14 years to win. Therefore, the indigenous forces eventually will have to win the war on their own, and they must develop the capacity to do so.



For some of our missions we dressed in Afghan garb, especially when we didn't want the Taliban to know our teams were operating in certain areas. Here I'm in the local garb with AK-47 ready to go. This is my favorite personal photo from Afghanistan.

2. Indigenous forces usually know the population and terrain better than external actors and are better able to gain intelligence.
3. A lead US role can be interpreted by the population as occupation (especially in Afghanistan).
4. A lead indigenous role can provide a focus for national aspirations and show the population that they control their own destiny.

### Integrating Tribal Security Forces into the national security apparatus

These Tribal Security Forces should be used to assist—not replace—the national and local police.

The bond here between the tribal leaders and councils and their US counterparts on the Tribal Engagement Teams is crucial. Remember, tribal honor codes mandate adherence to treaties and contracts, particularly between warriors who have fought side-by-side and risked their lives together.

A vast majority of the tribes just want to be left alone. Years and years of broken promises have severely damaged our ability to deal with the tribes. The Tribal Engagement Teams would show a commitment to the tribes and the tribal leadership that we will be unable to replicate in any other way. Putting US soldiers (TETs) on the ground with the tribes will say more about our commitment than anything else we can do. It will be a great "honor" and show them trust and respect by truly joining forces with them.

**BOTTOM LINE:** The GiroA (Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan) must find a way to incorporate the historical tribal structures into the national political system. It will not look like anything we can envision at this point, and may vary from province to province or even from tribe to tribe. But it can be done. Tribal Engagement Teams can help facilitate this. ►►

## CHAPTER VII

### TRIBES AND THE “ENEMY”

**W**HILE MOST OF THE TALIBAN ARE from Pashtun tribes, the tribes themselves are not the enemy. The Taliban, al-Qaeda, HIG (Hezb-e Islami), Haqqani and other insurgent networks are the tribes’ enemy—our enemy.

#### How tribesmen become Taliban

The Taliban find many willing recruits among disaffected tribesmen. The Taliban offer fame, glory and the chance to live exciting, meaningful (to them) lives. Many recruits see the Taliban as their only way to survive: Kill as a Taliban or be killed by the Taliban.

“By 2006 village jihadists accounted for 15 to 25 percent of the Taliban’s active fighting strength at any given time.” (*Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, Gius-  
tozzi, p. 43)

Our Tribal Engagement Teams (TET) can get inside this disaffection/recruitment cycle and show the tribes that our teams (and by extension, the Coalition Forces and the Afghan central government) are there to help them. If we give them a better alternative—show them that we are their friends and are committed for the long haul—they will not only not attack us, but will be more willing to share intelligence and even come back home and fight for their tribe.

#### The Taliban have been targeting the tribes for years

Taliban assassination teams have killed more than 120 tribal leaders in the past two years alone, and through intimidation driven many more away from their home districts. The practice of delivering “night

letters”—written death threats—on tribal leaders’ doorsteps is extremely effective. It’s gangland, Afghan style. But the tribes are not all taking this passively; many are arming and organizing on their own, without US help.

The use of *lashkars* (*Arbakai*) is spreading, and we need to be there in the right way to join them as allies, not as intruders. “There is going to be a civil war. These *lashkars* are spreading,” says Asfandyar Wali Khan, leader of the Awami National Party, which controls the provincial government in the NWFP.

“It will be the people versus the Taliban.” Wilkin-  
son, Marwat, *Tribal Chief Takes on Taliban with His Own Army*)

The tribes are forming their own anti-Taliban fighting units, the *Arbakai*. Their main mission is to protect tribal homelands from any perceived threat (be that US forces, Afghan Army units, Afghan Police units, predatory warlords, al-Qaeda and the Taliban). With our assistance they will grow stronger and be far more effective—and be our allies. Don’t we want to understand their motivations and influence them?

Engaging the tribes and understanding tribalism at its core is the surest and “lightest-footprint” opportunity we have to protect the tribes—the cultural and political foundation of Afghanistan—where they live, one tribe at a time. Doesn’t it make sense to join forces with as many of them as we can, while at the same time gaining valuable intelligence on our enemies? This is a fundamental step in establishing the basis for order and security in this region.

“Pakistan has already armed some of the tribes in areas where the Taliban is attempting to move in.

Many recruits see the Taliban as their only way to survive:  
Kill as a Taliban or be killed by the Taliban.

Some of these lashkars have as many 14,000 members in the FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) of Pakistan.” (DeYoung, *Will Give Arms To Tribal Militias*)

One tribal leader was recently quoted as saying, “I don’t need tanks. I don’t need planes. I don’t even need a single bullet. I will use sticks and I will use the guns my people have to defend themselves.” (Sappenfield, *To Fight Taliban*) Is that clear enough?

### Tribalism versus Talibanism

My team and I clearly proved it can be done. Malik Noorafzhal and his people loved us. They enjoyed our stories and our culture. We were able to disprove many of their preconceived notions about “us” (outsiders, Americans, infidels or whatever).

When we left there, I promise you that the tribe in Mangwel thought very highly of Americans and what we represented, how we acted, and how we treated them. This is not just of tactical importance to understand, but strategic importance as well.

The enemy thinks he can wait us out. However, we can turn time into an ally if we engage and partner with the tribes and, most importantly, demonstrate our commitment to them. Once they believe that we share the same objectives and are not leaving, they will support us and fight alongside us.

“The Taliban is exploiting our major strategic . . . and tactical weakness: an inability to connect with the population (the tribes). Officials working in Pakistan and Afghanistan support this view, claiming that the youth ‘oppose the current tribal system because they know it is not harnessing its potential.’” (*Koran*,

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importantly, demonstrate our  
commitment to them.  
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*Kalashnikov and Laptop*, Giustozzi, p. 39.)

My Tribal Engagement Strategy can beat the Taliban at its own game. “In its simplicity and effectiveness, the insurgents’ reliance on small teams to infiltrate villages and weed-out pro-Kabul elements was to prove one of the strongest aspects

of the Taliban strategy. It pitted Taliban strength (abundance of commitment, ideologically indoctrinated young fighters able to achieve basic tasks even without supervision from field commanders) against government/Coalition Forces weaknesses (shortage of manpower, little or no presence in the villages, inability to patrol extensively away from the main roads, and a lack of effective intelligence networks in most areas).” (*Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop*, Giustozzi, p. 102)

We must help the tribes protect themselves by fighting alongside them. Will we make mistakes? Yes. But the risk is well worth the gain.

**BOTTOM LINE:** For the Afghan people, the real war is one of Tribalism vs. Talibanism. If we do not move now to support the tribes in this fight for their lives, it will produce a number of consequences, all of them bad: Taliban operations will expand over larger areas, killing more tribesmen and sweeping in more recruits as they go.

The one system in Afghanistan that has been reliable for centuries will continue to crumble, resulting in more disaffected tribal members drifting into terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism. Thus we will give up on the most critical element of Afghan society that can ultimately defeat the Taliban—the tribes. We simply cannot let this happen. ►►

**My Tribal Engagement Strategy can beat the Taliban at its own game.**

## CHAPTER VIII

### HOW TO ENGAGE THE TRIBES

#### Rapport building and cross-cultural competency is the key

**I**F AN IMPORTANT PART OF OUR STRATEGY is to build working, ground-level alliances with the tribes, how do we make this happen? My ODA 316 and I created a model for successful tribal engagement and all that it requires. The relationships I developed in Iraq and Afghanistan not only worked while we were there, they have stood the test of time and continue to this day. This chapter is all about how our model can be adapted successfully to similar situations anywhere.

First, let's look at an earlier example of successful tribal engagement. One of the main areas under contention today is in Southeast Afghanistan near Khas Khonar and the Pesch Valley areas. This is exactly where Sitting Bull's village of Mangwel is located. This same area was one of the British Empire's most challenging territories. How did they deal with it?

"From the 1890s to 1947, British control relied heavily on a small number of highly trained British officers. These frontier officers were highly educated, committed, conscientious, and hard working. Many had studied law and the history of the area and spoke some of the local languages. They had a deep sense of duty and a strong national identity. All required a depth of administrative competence and judgment to successfully wield the extensive powers at their disposal. They contributed significantly to the province's security and stability. These men were particularly valuable in navigating the intricacies of tribal politics." (*To Create a Stable Afghanistan*, Roe, p. 20, Military Review, Nov-Dec 2005)

The key to a successful tribal engagement strategy is the ability to identify men (Tribal Engagement Team members) who have a special gift for cross-cultural competency and building rapport—that is, they must become educated in the ways of the tribes

and build strong relationships with them based on mutual trust and objectives.

These men must like to fight and spend countless months, even years living in harsh circumstances. They will have to fully comprehend tribal concepts of honor, loyalty and revenge—the Pashtunwali code. Initially, they will have very little physical security other than the AK-47 they carry, their planning skills and the tribal fighters they live with.

#### Tribal Engagement Team (TET) challenges

The situation at each tribe will be complex and will vary with each tribe. Each will present its unique spider web of loyalties and subtle agendas that a Tribal Engagement Team must deal with smartly—and brutally when necessary. At the same time these men must be alert to detect and mediate local rivalries, sometimes within the tribe they are advising. They will have to be subjective on one issue and objective with another.

Five main problems we face in Afghanistan are:

The IED threat, the civilian casualties caused by air strikes, the inability of US forces to protect locals in rural areas, the immediate need for more Afghan and US troops, and the fact that we are losing the tactical and strategic information campaign there.

This tribal engagement plan addresses all five problems head on.

First, the IED threat will decrease to near zero because there will be little need to move troops around. The TETs will live in the village with the tribe. There will be no need to travel the dangerous roads between the firebases and the population.

*Second*, the TETs will be living with the tribe in its village, so calling in air strikes on your own village is not an option, unless the decision is made by the tribal leader in extreme circumstances. The tribal leader will be the final authority to make the call for air support, thus avoiding civilian casualties in his tribal domain.

*Third*, TETs living inside the village, not in some distant firebase, will increase the security of the village. The enemy will have to be much more aggressive to penetrate the tribal area, and that will dramatically increase the chances that we (the TET and *Arbakai*) will be able to kill them.

*Fourth*, the TETs will decrease the need for both US and Afghan government forces by training and advising a Tribal Security Force (TSF) or *Arbakai*. The *Arbakai* could be trained, equipped and organized as a modular, loose-knit unit. Eventually each TSF could be integrated into a kind of confederation—with district, regional and national units—to fight against any greater threat. Attack one tribe and you attack us all. This will take years to accomplish, but it will have tremendous enduring benefits for all concerned.

*Fifth*, the TETs must develop their own Information Operations and provide ground reports to all news media—the story has to be told. International media coverage of Muslim countries is extremely important. Seventy to eighty percent of the Afghan population cannot read, so videos and the spoken word in Pashto will be essential. This strategy will not work without a major Information Operations (IO) campaign.

### Tactical Tribal Engagement

Tactical Tribal Engagement (TTE) is one possible solution in certain areas for the current problems facing the United States military in Afghanistan. This tactical strategy has far-reaching effects that will impact the operational and strategic nature of the war not only in Afghanistan, but across the border region of eastern Afghanistan and the ungoverned areas of the FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) in Pakistan, specifically the northern FATA areas.

#### Essential TTE Tasks:

- 1.** Establish and maintain rapport with the chosen tribe in the area. Advise and assist its leaders in all matters.
- 2.** Provide real security for the village. Not presence patrols, but 24/7 on-site security. A permanent presence that the tribes can rely on. “Advise, assist, train, equip and lead” a TSF, an *Arbakai*.
- 3.** Facilitate tactical civic action programs. Integration with the local Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) is crucial, along with the ability to use funds that units have at their disposal for “quick” money to help tribes who are facilitating the success of CF and the Afghan government. The TETs would also address basic health care and infrastructure services (water, electricity and irrigation), construction and repair of schools and clinics, both to improve the life of the tribe and employ its individual members for pay. These programs should be worked through the local/district/provincial/national government when possible and be integrated into the US battle space owner’s overall plan.
- 4.** Employ an aggressive tactical PSYOP plan that ties into the overall strategic IO campaign in the area. Tribes also can heavily counter the Taliban propaganda. This is a critical aspect of the success of the TTE strategy. The world has to see the Afghan tribes and US soldiers working, living, laughing, fighting and dying together.
- 5.** Report “Ground Truth” continuously. This activity would tie the tribe in with all levels of the government system. It would also be the process by which the tribe’s concerns are relayed directly to the CF military apparatus. Such ongoing accounting would serve as a check and balance, reporting what is actually happening on the ground as opposed to what the GIRQA (Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan) may say is happening. “Ground Truth” provides feedback to headquarters level units (battle space owners) in charge of the area ANA and ANP.

**"I want the entire plan to be so effective that the Taliban feel threatened by our very presence, without us even firing a shot."**

TET solutions should always be answers to local problems, yet always with an eye to integration with regional and national government representatives. It will also be imperative for TETs to watch for scenarios where local/district/provincial/national government forces can be successful. In other words, cooperate and help set the government up for success.

In return, the TSFs and tribal members would provide security, intelligence and early warning of insurgent attacks to the TETs, who would then pass this on to higher commands.

#### **Mission Statement of a TET Leader:**

I will train myself, my Tribal Engagement Team and my tribal counterpart for the tactical fight every single day.

I will establish strong, meaningful relationships with the tribal leaders.

My goal is to establish a relationship with my tribal counterpart, for my team to establish a strong relationship with the tribe; to establish focused security for the tribe and the locals in the area; to plan, develop and then implement a well-conceived IO, PSYOP and CA plan.

I want to make it so the Taliban and al-Qaeda have no choice but to come and meet us on our terms.

I want the entire plan to be so effective that the Taliban feel threatened by our very presence, without us even firing a shot.

*A key requirement is to tie the tribe and the TET into the following areas:*

- The local ANA and ANP.
- Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs).
- National level Information Operations facilitators to include all major news agencies and publications.

- The local US forces (battle space owners).
- The ODA in the area.
- Higher echelon PSYOP units.
- Higher echelon CA units.
- Access to air assets for re-supply and CAS.
- NGO's
- Report "Ground Truth" to higher commands. Be the conduit of information and requests from the GIRoA and higher to and from the tribes. Report "Ground Truth" as well as the tribes' perceptions and expectations to the GIRoA and higher.

*The key tasks in relation to the tribal leadership will be:*

- Listen
- Understand
- Learn
- Influence

#### **"Influence Without Authority"**

I could re-insert a Tribal Engagement Team in Mangwel tomorrow. However, in other areas it would take more time to perform a proper operational preparation of the battlefield (OPB) and build enough rapport to begin. There are many "acceptable" areas available. Acceptable does not mean no risk. This is not a strategy for the risk-averse. However, with the work we've done already, my TET would be safer in Mangwel than anywhere in Afghanistan.

Given the time and resources, I would go anywhere in the country and do this. It would take one month to prepare the TET for insertion into the area of operations (AO): I would need two weeks to do an analysis of the area (Area Study) and another two weeks to train my TET on the tactical tasks necessary

to conduct the mission. The TET's goal is to achieve "influence without authority." The most reliable and lasting influence happens by acting as partners, not distant superiors or strangers.

The TSFs (*Arbakai*) will be a much more credible force than the local police (ANP) for many reasons. They will also give the villages and tribes what they need most: an accepted, professional force that can offer the tribe protection from the Taliban.

The relationships the TETs build with their tribes will have long-lasting effects, free of influence or interference by local/district/provincial/national politics. The TET/TSF alliance will be able to govern and secure the tribe's area until the tribe is confident that the local police and army can help protect them.

Even then the tribes will be able to maintain their autonomy.

Afghan tribes do not give up their autonomy to anyone. Many, many tribal militias fought against the presence of the Taliban long before 9/11.

The TET will also need to monitor closely the relationship the tribe has with other tribes in the area, and how they are interacting. Of course, the goal is to incorporate as many other tribes as possible into the TTE strategy and give each tribe a TET. That is the major goal of the expansion phase of the operation.

Why chase the enemy? Make him come to us. And when I say "us" I mean a group of people who have the same goals: the TET and the tribe.



Influence without authority — Sitting Bull and I enjoyed each other's company. Our camaraderie set the tone for our team's relationship with the rest of the tribe. We laughed and spoke of many things that most US forces are taught as being taboo.

Make no mistake, there is a lot more fighting and killing to do. We should do it on our terms, side by side with Afghans with as many advantages as we can have. The TTE strategy will give us that.

This plan requires a small group of men who can comprehend the extensive networks, influences and idiosyncrasies of the mission and the environment. We're talking about "street smarts"—the instinct to grasp and account for all second, third and fourth order effects of decisions at all levels.

This is warfare at the Ph.D. level. It is constantly changing and requires continual assessment. Only a few dedicated men can execute this plan properly.

It will become a very personal fight. Once we commit to the tribe, the Pashtunwali code comes into effect for the US team as well. In the end it will be the

TET's ability to build a true bond with the tribe that is backed up by warrior ethos: the ability and desire to fight and die alongside them when necessary.

### **Start small, think big**

This strategy can be tested on a pilot basis. It doesn't have to cost a lot of money. Tactical Tribal Engagement can be tried out on a small-scale (one or two tribes in a given area) to determine how productive it will be for the long term. It will take at least six months to a year to see any tangible results. Once it is demonstrated that this course of action will work, more resources can be put into it for the long-term (three to five years). I think everyone agrees that Afghanistan will not be won overnight. This strategy requires an investment of time, but not major manpower or resources.



Sitting Bull, Dr. Akbar and I enjoyed many late-night conversations in the midst of our tribal friends.



We helped the tribe with village projects whenever we could. ODA 316 built this well for Dr. Ahkbar.

Even if the TTE strategy does not work on a large scale, wouldn't 10 or 20 successes impact the overall COIN fight in Afghanistan? I believe the answer is yes. As a matter of fact, success in Mangwel is almost a guarantee if I can get there before Malik Noorafzhal passes away. He is 86 years old and time is ticking.

Now, as always, the enemy has a vote as well. As the TETs and the TSFs become more of a threat, the more the Taliban will increase the time, resources, capacity and will to destroy or at least disrupt their operation. This will increase the overall threat and in turn the violence directed at both TET and the tribe.

### The risks of Tactical Tribal Engagement

Each TET tribe will become a target and will take casualties. The US Teams themselves will be targeted.

There will be fighting. But the fighting will be US soldiers alongside tribesmen against a common enemy. Isn't that what we want?

There will also be "push-back" from assorted Afghan officials, powerbrokers, warlords, criminals, and some minority races in Afghanistan, as we would be arming and training a majority of Pashtun tribes.

### How do we deal with competing tribes?

One of the keys here is to ensure that we tie what we are doing at the tactical level to regional and national representatives. Not coordinating our goals and operations with Afghanistan's national political/military elements only promotes a confusing and contentious relationship between the various government entities and the tribal system.

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Isn't that what we want?

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From top to ground level, we ideally must all be on the "same page" and move forward as one united force.

My last thought on the long-term effect of this strategy is that of the Chinese bamboo tree . . .

*When a Chinese bamboo tree is planted, the grower must water and nurture it. The first year, it does not grow more than one inch above the ground. During the second year, after more watering and fertilizing, the tree does not grow anymore than it did during year one. The bamboo tree is still no more than one inch high after four years. Nothing tangible can be seen by any outsider.*

*But, on the fifth year the tree can grow more than eighty feet. Of course, the first four years the tree was growing its roots, deep into the ground. It is the roots that enable the tree to create an explosion of growth in year five.*

**BOTTOM LINE:** A TET strategy will have to be given the time and patience to do its work. But as our teams continue to establish themselves, one tribe at a time, their influence will reach a tipping point and become a far-reaching strategic influence. ►►



The Original Six. This is not a good quality photograph—taken in near dark with a marginal camera—but it may be the only picture I have of the original six members of ODA 316. Yes, there were only six of us during our first three months of fighting in Mangwel.

Clockwise from me sitting down in front: SFC Mark Read above my right shoulder, then SFC Chuck Burroughs, SSG Dan McKone, SSG Tony Siriwardene, SSG Scott Gross on Tony's left, and finally that is Khalid, my outstanding interpreter, sitting below Scott.

I have always loved this picture as it was these six men who started what would become a great fighting unit that found Sitting Bull and a new way to fight the Taliban in Afghanistan.

## TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT TEAM TIMELINE

The first timeline noted below moves the TET into an area that supports US presence or a TET member who already has strong ties in the area (like Mangwel). I call this a *permissive scenario*.

The second scenario is one where the tribal members are neutral to US support or there is no prior relationship with TET members entering the area. In this case, the timeline would be pushed out from three to nine additional months. This situation would be a *semi-permissive scenario*.

The permissive and semi-permissive scenario is in relation to the tribe, not the environment itself. Although the tribe may be permissive (receptive) to the TET, the overall environment may be semi-permissive or even non-permissive. The fact may be that a particular tribe may want the TET, yet be surrounded by tribes that may not. Or the Taliban may have support in an area where the tribes support the TET.

By far the most important daily task is building rapport. This is our security. This is what will allow the TET to accomplish “influence without authority.”

### Permissive environment phases with timeline:

The Taliban will know immediately when a tribe receives some sort of US team and that the team is living inside the village with a tribe.

**1. Preparation Phase (1-2 months):** The TET begins its Operational Preparation of the Battlefield (OPB) development.

Information gathering (area study), intelligence collection and analysis, intensive language training, logistics planning, detailed logistics request.

Tactical train-up with TET members.

**2. Infiltration, Report and Organization Phase (1 month):** The TET assesses and develops relationships in the tribe and begins training the TSF (*Arbakai*).

*Infiltration.* The TET would move into the closest firebase (FB) to a selected tribal area and begin its tactical Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield and continue its training.

*Initial Contact.* This would vary based on the enemy threat and the history of the area. In Mangwel my team and I could show up completely unannounced and it would work. In other areas the TET may have to request a meeting with the tribal leader or possibly even send a local ANA/ANP unit to the village to request that the head Malik (tribal leader) come to the firebase to talk.

Determine with the tribal leaders how many TSF (*Arbakai*) members they want, how many they need and what the TET can realistically support and train.

**3. Assessment and Build-up Phase (6 to 8 months):** The TET begins to build a true relationship with the tribe by this time and can make a much better assessment of the ways and means of the tribe. Focus is on the training program for the TSF and security posture of the TET. This period will be the most dangerous for the TET as it will become apparent that the tribe is receiving outside support and becoming a threat to any enemy in the area. The threat to the tribe and the TET will increase in direct proportion to the success of the TET's integration with the tribe.

**4. Expansion and Sustainment Phase (continuous, open-ended time frame):**

During this phase the biggest strides will be made by integrating the tribe into the local/district/regional and national government because they will be secure and, most importantly, they will feel respected and honored because the US has shown a clear commitment to them.

How to choose the right tribes to partner with? One good way is using “will” and “capacity” as benchmarks for initial screening. Some tribes have both the will and capacity to fight the Taliban. Other tribes have the will but not the capacity. Other tribes have the capacity and not the will.

### **What about the Tajiks, the Hazaras, and the Uzbeks?**

Do we support some of those tribes as well? I believe we should.

There is also the issue of key terrain located in a specific tribal area, and even areas the Taliban may need for various reasons (opium, supply and infiltration routes, etc.). The decision to support which tribe(s) would be an Afghan one. We (the US) also would need to put our own analysts and criteria to it to ensure that the right decisions were being made.

The method of performance (MOP) and the method of evaluation (MOE) criteria actually will not be that difficult to determine for the TET. However, as the RAND study points out, “Effective analysis capability is a critical component of any capability. Counterinsurgency operations require the development of an analytical methodology to measure the insurgency’s impact on the local population—especially the impact of the security condition. Several factors can make it difficult to measure the effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations: Progress cannot be measured by the advance of militaries across a map as in conventional warfare; focusing only on guerrilla fighters misses the broader support network; a complicated array of political, economic, social, and military factors can fuel the insurgency; and there are rarely ideal predefined qualitative or quantitative target metrics.” (Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, p. 122)

### **Every day the Tribal Engagement Team will focus on security and quality of life issues**

A major concern is initial security. This must be built from the inside out. Our influence comes

not just from providing security or enabling the tribe to provide it themselves. It is the fact that we are there. We are living with the tribe, sharing their dangers and hardships. This does not require a massive footprint. A very small team can accomplish miracles. I have seen it and I have done it.

After a relationship has been built with the tribes, we will be able to gather relevant and actionable intelligence on the Taliban, HIG, Haqqani and al-Qaeda networks in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The tribe and the Tribal Security Force and specially trained tribesmen who live among the population are in a position to gather information and intelligence. Make no mistake about it, these tribesmen have the ability to collect the type of intelligence we need to be successful.

The TETs need the latitude to dress, speak and act in the ways that will maximize their acceptance by the tribes. This may mean wearing local garb, growing beards, and interacting with the tribe on a personal level. They must be able to "go native." Go to the tribe's elementary school daily. Learn Pashto from them. Learn about being a Muslim. Learn about Islam. Learn about the tribe. Ideally, TETs must not only live with the tribe, but steadily integrate themselves into tribal life and customs (as much as the tribe allows). My experience in Mangwel would not be believed by most who did not see it firsthand.

Targeting Taliban and al-Qaeda will be a secondary but at times needed task.

### **The Tribal Security Force (*Arbakai*) would have three primary elements:**

- 1.** A security force responsible for the physical safety of the village/tribe members.
- 2.** An intelligence collection element (*kishakee*).
- 3.** An offensive action and reconnaissance element. This element could integrate itself with ANA or CF elements with the help of the TETs.

The initial priority would be to quickly mobilize the TSFs. They can become an effective force in a short period of time, possibly in 90 days.

Paying the TSF will automatically improve the financial situation of the village and create a stronger bond with the tribesmen who live there.

### **Task Organization**

#### **The following is a "shopping list" of what I, or any TET leader, would need on Day One:**

- 3/6/12 US personnel based on environment
- 2 interpreters
- 2 SAT phones
- 2 SATCOM radio (piggyback freq)
- 2 PRC-119s

- 2 ATVs
- 2 Pick-up trucks
- 3 Generators
- 2 Computers with a biometrics kit

**Initial infill logistics package for the tribe:**

- 100 AK-47s
- 30,000 to 50,000 rounds of ammunition
- Assorted medical supplies
- A “Gift of Honor” for the tribal chief

One must have a true love and respect for the Afghan people (the tribes) and be willing to give a better part of his life for this strategy to work.

Not everyone will be able to do this nor should they. But for those warriors who are qualified and feel the calling, it will be the adventure of a lifetime.



Someday you too could fly an American flag outside your firebase, as we did at ours here in Asadabad.

# CHAPTER IX

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

“Many so-called failed states are really failed tribes.”

—David Ronfeldt, *Tribes First and Forever*

**W**E HAVE TO STUDY AND UNDERSTAND the tribes. Become their true friends and let them see us in all of our strengths and faults as well.

### Work with tribalism, not against it

“In the absence of state institutions, how can a typical civil society’s service requirements be provided or administered in an efficient manner? One way is to use traditional groups such as tribes who have experience in performing local governance roles and functions.” (Taylor, *Tribal Alliances: Ways, Means and Ends to a Successful Strategy*, p. 9)

In the words of Haji Mohammed Zalmay, one of the better district governors in Konar province, “The key to success is getting tribes to come to *shuras* and keeping them united.”

Remember, in most cases the Taliban is not present in areas where the tribes do not want them to be.

Whether the US “wins” or “loses” in Afghanistan, the tribes will still be there. As David Ronfeldt says in *Tribes First and Forever*, “The tribe will never lose its significance or its attractiveness; it is not going away in the centuries ahead.” Therefore, we must learn to understand the tribe’s significance now.

There will be no large-scale “awakening” of the tribes in Afghanistan, as there was in al-Anbar province in Iraq. It will be a much slower and more difficult process.

### Nine Differences between Iraq and Afghanistan

In an excellent paper by Carter Malkasian and Jerry Meyerle entitled, *How is Afghanistan different from al-Anbar?*, the authors list nine differences and four implications of those differences:

1. Sectarianism in Iraq versus government misrule in Afghanistan
2. The strength of Arab tribes in Al Anbar versus Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan
3. Afghanistan’s unique history of warlordism
4. The major rift in the al-Anbar insurgency versus the minor rifts in the Afghan insurgency
5. Arab tribal customs in Iraq versus the Pashtun tribal code (Pashtunwali) in Afghanistan
6. The urban al-Anbar insurgency versus the rural Afghan insurgency
7. The IED and suicide attacks of the Anbar insurgents versus the small-unit tactics of the Afghan insurgents [Note: this point is not as valid in 2009 as it was in 2007.]
8. Fuel smuggling in al-Anbar versus the poppy trade in Afghanistan
9. The cross-border sanctuaries surrounding al-Anbar versus Pakistan’s tribal areas

We must learn to understand the tribe’s significance now.

## **Four Implications of these differences**

- 1.** Government misrule and warlordism define the problem in Afghanistan. Without reducing the abusive behavior of the government and their warlord clients, it is hard to see how security measures will have a long lasting effect.
- 2.** Together, the large sanctuary in Pakistan's tribal area and the poppy trade make the insurgency resilient. They may have the wherewithal to go round after round, fighting season after fighting season.
- 3.** The fragmented nature of the tribal system, the absence of a major rift between tribes and the insurgents, and the feuding of Pashtunwali demand patience and forethought in the planning and execution of tribal engagement efforts. Small-scale community successes are more likely than large-scale province-wide successes.
- 4.** Pashtunwali, a rural environment, and the tactical skills of the insurgency call for a re-thinking of the tactics of counterinsurgency. Some tactics, most notably cordon and searches, air strikes, and population control measures may need to be restrained. Because of Pashtunwali, their costs may exceed their benefits.

### **"It's the Tribes, Stupid"**

Steven Pressfield's videos/writings on tribalism are the most useful resources I have found on understanding tribalism. The author of *Gates of Fire* and *The Afghan Campaign* has a blog called "It's the Tribes, Stupid," which provides the historical and conceptual context for a tribal engagement strategy in Afghanistan.

See it at <http://blog.stevenpressfield.com>.

### **What scares me most**

On a personal note, my gravest concern is that a Tribal Engagement strategy in some form will indeed be adopted and implemented, but that the US may eventually again abandon Afghanistan—and the

~~~~~  
I will get on a helicopter tonight,  
armed with an AK-47 and 300  
rounds of ammunition, and put  
my life on the line and my  
strategy to the test.  
Will you do the same?  
~~~~~

tribes to whom we have promised long-term support will be left to be massacred by a vengeful Taliban.

This is by far the worst outcome we could have.

It is immoral and unethical to ask a tribe to help us and promise them support and then leave them to defend themselves on their own. If our forces do withdraw from Afghanistan, we should decide now to arm the tribes who support us with enough weapons and ammunition to survive after we leave.

### **A commitment to the tribes and people of Afghanistan**

I emphasized at the beginning of this paper that I am neither a strategist nor an academic. I know there will be many criticisms that span all levels of war, from military personnel to pundits.

But I also know this: I will get on a helicopter tonight, armed with an AK-47 and 300 rounds of ammunition and put my life on the line and my strategy to the test. Will you do the same?

**BOTTOM LINE:** There may be dozens of reasons not to adopt this strategy. But there is only one reason to do so—we have to. *Nothing else will work.* ►►

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost I want to thank the great warriors of ODA 316. It seems like so long ago. No one will ever believe how much we did with so little in those early days in the Konar. We have all continued to fight and have taken it to the enemy at every opportunity. Leading you was the greatest honor of my life.

Initial members of ODA 316 (by rank):

Ron Bryant  
Al Lapene  
Chuck Burroughs  
Mark Read  
Tony Siriwardene  
Scott Gross  
Dan McKone  
James Tierney  
Travis Weitzel  
Luke Murray  
Clay Petty  
Brent Watson  
Dave Casson

Second, my good friend Steve Pressfield. Only he knows what his words have meant to me. I would not have done this without him. He is a great author and historian. He is a better friend.

Third, my wife. She has put up with all the long deployments and all the "baggage" that comes with that. And thanks for all the hours you let me spend in front of the computer just before my upcoming deployment to Iraq.

Fourth, my dad. "The best team always wins . . ."

Lastly, my second "father" friend, fellow warrior and great leader, Malik Noorafzhal, "Sitting Bull." It was my greatest wish in all the world that I would get to see him with my own eyes again and say, "Sitting Bull, I told you I would come back. I told you I would return." I could have died a happy man had that happened.

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## SIZE MATTERS

Steven Pressfield's followup interview with Major Jim Gant

**SIZE MATTERS** was published November 9, 2009  
on <http://blog.stevenpressfield.com>.  
It is reproduced here in its entirety.

**T**oday we have a special follow-up interview with Maj. Jim Gant, on the subject of how big (or small) a Tribal Engagement Team should be—and what kind of large-scale support it would need.

**SP:** Major Gant, in your paper, “One Tribe At A Time,” you describe the ideal size for a Tribal Engagement Team as between six and twelve. In fact your original ODA team in Konar province was just six men. Why do you believe smaller is better?

**Jim Gant:** Just to clarify, I started with nine guys on the team, but only six were Special Forces. We picked up three additional men in Afghanistan—a TAC-P, a PSYOP attachment and a Civil Affairs attachment. Those three guys went through all of the team’s

individual skills training and all the team’s Immediate Action Drill (IAD) training. They lived with us, slept where we slept and did what we did. They were as much a part of the team as anyone. Now to answer the question:

Smaller is better for a Tribal Engagement Team (TET) for several reasons (and this only applies to tribes in Afghanistan.) First, with Afghan tribes there is what I call an “acceptable level of integration.” It is something that can be hard to determine unless you are on the ground with the tribe daily. Too many soldiers in a tribal area can cause major disruption of the daily life of the villagers. It can also bring a fight to the tribe that would not otherwise have been there.

With a platoon of soldiers, who likely will set up a mini-fire base, walking around in body armor and helmets, the tribesmen will quickly become alienated by their presence. This is at the tactical level. At the strategic level, too many troops and we become “occupiers.”

What we are after at the tactical level is cooperation without dependence. The bottom line is that the tribe must be able to protect itself. We, the TET, will help facilitate this in a major way, but the TET cannot “secure” the tribe. The tribe has to secure the tribe.

Another point is that this “smaller is better” is counter-intuitive, like a lot of things we do at the tactical level. Tactically what we are dealing with is not a “clash of cultures” but we commit “cultural fratricide,” and too many troops with the tribes would be doing just that—trying to help would actually make the situation worse.

Another positive aspect of using a small team is that we show trust in the tribe on Day One by showing up with so few men. The tribesmen that I



Time is our most important weapon on the tactical level—and our most dangerous enemy on the strategic.

have dealt with are extremely smart and savvy. They understand the symbology of coming in with such a small force. It says more to them than any number of words. I can hear critics saying “symbology?” You are willing to risk your life and the lives of your men just to prove your men’s warrior ethos to the tribe? The answer is yes! On the flip side is this: how urgent is it for the TET to establish relationships? To be of value? To show their worth? It will be critical because their lives will depend on the tribes for protection.

The final aspect is one that I think a lot of people are missing. We aren’t going to roll the dice and play “pick a tribe.” Some serious analysis and information gathering must take place prior even to initial contact. That is where a prior relationship is an enormous plus. The Tribal Engagement Team can literally take months (six to nine) off the timeline to start seeing success because they will be going in with a prior relationship.

**SP:** When we were talking the other day, you said that an Afghan tribe could easily kill the U.S. Tribal Engagement Team attached to it any time it wanted to, because the team’s numbers were so few. Yet you also stated that you and your team felt safer in the village of Mangwel than you did in your own firebase. Why?



It is not the armor on your vehicles that will keep you safe, but your relationship with the indigenous forces you’re working with.

—Scott Gross, ODA 316, in Mangwel, Konar province

**JG:** As I have said over and over to my students at the unconventional warfare (UW) stage of their Special Forces training: It is not the armor on your vehicles, your body armor or your weapons systems that will keep you safe . . . it is your relationship with the indigenous force that you are working with. “Friends don’t let friends get hurt.”

This was true in my experience in Iraq, where the fighting was almost constant in ’06-’07, and of course it was true in Afghanistan with Malik Noorafzhal (“Sitting Bull”) and his tribe. “Rapport” is a word that is often thrown around. But what does it mean? It means relationship. What is a relationship based on? How strong is it? Is it mutual? How do you get it?

I have put together a model of how I believe you achieve the ultimate relationship with your indigenous, irregular or host-nation counterpart—with the end-state being “cultural integration.” Cultural integration is the point where you can be yourself and your counterpart can be himself with no concern for cultural taboos or cultural mis-steps.

Now this is a very detailed and very long process, but it can and has been done by many more Special Forces soldiers than myself. Take a look at what SF did with the Montagnards in Vietnam.

I would also like to reiterate that many other conventional units have been able to establish rapport with irregular forces and have a positive influence over them.

It all comes down to TIME. In this type of situation, you have to invest your most precious commodity as an advisor and that is TIME. That is why I don’t care for the term Key Leader Engagement (KLE). In most cases, this is a meeting. Issues are discussed, plans are made, and then everyone goes their separate ways. This is not Tribal Engagement as I see it.

In Afghanistan, with the tribes that I dealt with, the relationships grew in direct proportion to the amount of time invested in them. Good old-fashioned seconds, minutes, hours, days, months and years. The right five or six guys can offer a tribal leader and his tribe all the time in the world. Time

**In Afghanistan, with the tribes that I dealt with, the relationships grew in direct proportion to the amount of time invested in them.**

is our greatest weapon at the tactical level and our greatest enemy at the strategic level.

As a tie-in to the above question—there is nothing (and I emphasize *nothing*) that can prove yourself and your team to the tribe more than fighting alongside them. That is the ultimate testament of your team as warriors and your commitment to the tribe. It will create the foundation for “influence without authority” that is the key to success in tribal engagement.

**SP:** One sentence popped out to me in last Monday’s post. If you remember, it was from an e-mail written to you by a female soldier who had served in Afghanistan in a capacity close to the tribes. She said, “The improvements in Paktia and Khowst were indescribable, but quickly faded as ‘big army’ moved in shortly after our exit in 2004.” Is there a point or number at which foreign forces on tribal turf become “too many” and cease being viewed by the tribes as guests and instead become occupiers? Do certain tenets of the Pashtunwali code of honor come into play, depending on how many Americans there are in an area?

**JG:** As I said above, there definitely is a point where too many troops becomes counter-productive. The hard part is determining where that is. There are times and locations where large-scale “search and attack” missions are not only necessary but critical. Even if a large-scale Tribal Engagement Strategy were adopted, there would be many times where a battalion of soldiers would need to air-assault in somewhere and kill insurgents. Also, make no mistake, there will be a lot of fighting at one point or another, even if the TET was extremely successful. The enemy is not just going to sit and do nothing as you build capacity within a tribal area.

**SP:** Col. Bing West, author of *The Village* and *The Strongest Tribe*, just wrote an excellent article for *Small Wars Journal* called “Afghanistan Trip Report.” One of his observations included the statement,

“... ODA teams quickly develop relationships [with tribes] regardless of tour length, because they are mature. Relationships with Afghan elders require elderly (ahem, E6 or above!) NCOs and officers ...” Would you agree that the ideal composition of a Tribal Engagement Team, in addition to being small, would also be “mature?”

**JG:** First of all, I am embarrassed to say that I just read *The Village* by Col. West a week ago. It is a tremendous book with so many lessons that it should be required reading for any TET.

Now, when talking about the specifics of what I would be looking for: first and foremost, I would want warriors—soldiers who like the fight, who enjoy the challenges of combat. Second, they would have to have excellent interpersonal skills. In a lot of cases, this would mean a more seasoned soldier.

However, having just spent two years as an instructor out at the unconventional warfare (UW) phase of Special Forces training, I can testify that the majority of the time the worst soldier on the ODA would be the 18X; at the same time the best one would be an 18X. What is an 18X? It is a program where qualified personnel can join up and try out for SF “right off the street,” with no military experience. So I believe it is more about a skill set than about maturity.

Now, the average age of a team that I would pick would be pretty “old,” with combat experience and very good interpersonal skills that I would have first-hand knowledge of. They would have to be effective communicators with extreme patience. Lastly, they would have to “want it.” This type of mission and this type of team would not be successful overnight; the team members would have to have an incredible commitment to the mission, the overall war effort, and of course to the tribe they would be living with.

**PART II ▶**

## PART II

If a Tribal Engagement Strategy (TES) were to be tried in Afghanistan, how exactly would it work? Last week, in the first part of this “Size Matters” post, we spoke with Maj. Jim Gant about the optimal size for a single U.S. Tribal Engagement Team (TET)—that is, the tactical unit that would be attached to a single Afghan tribe. Maj. Gant strongly advocated the position that smaller is better. Six to twelve men, no more.

There is [Maj. Gant says] what I call an “acceptable level of integration.” It is something that can be hard to determine unless you are on the ground with the tribe daily. At the tactical level too many soldiers in a tribal area can cause major disruption of the daily life of the villagers. It can also bring a fight to the tribe that otherwise would not have been there. With a full platoon of soldiers, who more than likely will set up some type of mini-fire base, walking around in body-armor and helmets, the tribesmen and their families will quickly become alienated by the American presence. At the strategic level, too many troops and we become “occupiers.” What we are after at the tactical level is cooperation without dependence.

**SP:** Someone reading this Q&A might say, “Yeah,



The Security Plan would be very well rehearsed and executed many times with the tribesmen taking the lead.

those small numbers sound great in some little village that is peaceful, but what if you guys get into really serious trouble? What if the enemy comes after you in force?”

**JG:** I have put more thought into this than any other tactical question. As in any military mission, security is the first and most important task. Now, in this case, the task is daunting as hell, since the consequences of being unable to accomplish security would be catastrophic. In some cases small units are able to overcome lapses in security with overwhelming firepower. A TET will not be able to do this. I will not get into the specifics here, but believe me when I say the planning prior to the mission being conducted, coupled with the extreme steps that would be initially executed on the ground, no enemy force would be able to walk into your area in the middle of the night and cut your throat while you were asleep. That just would not happen. Period.

Now, in the case you describe above, let me emphasize a few things. First, the TET’s immediate and most critical task would be to establish security. Everything the TET did for the first 90 days (an estimate) would be in relation to security—security for the TET and security for the tribe. This security would be layered and have depth as well as reach. It would consist of early-warning systems and intelligence fusion that would allow the TET to use the U.S. intelligence assets it would have at its disposal, and fuse these with the incredible human intelligence systems that are already established on the ground by the tribe.

The situation that occurred recently up in Nuristan was extreme and tragic with U.S. soldiers fighting for their lives. I was not there and do not know the specifics of the situation, but I do think that they were in Combat Outposts (COPs). A TET’s circumstances would be completely different. Think about it. The enemy would have to mass and then attack an Afghan village, and would have to kill many Afghan tribesmen in the attack.

It is not as if the TET would be the only personnel there with weapons. As I pointed out, I would infiltrate with weapons and ammunition on Day One. This is

**... no enemy force would be able to walk into your area in the middle of the night  
and cut your throat while you were asleep. That just would not happen.**

for several reasons. One, as a “gift of honor” to the tribal chief. Two, as a show of commitment and trust. And three, so there will be tribesmen with guns and ammo to help protect themselves, their tribe and us.

Here again, we circle around to the main point of the whole premise of the power in a TES. It is about building relationships. The head tribesman and his fighters will not allow us (the TET) to be harmed. Your earlier posts “Gifts of Honor: A Tale of Two Captains” and “A Tale of Two Captains, Part II,” tell the story of Sitting Bull [the tribal chief, Malik Noorafzhal, with whom Maj. Gant and his Special Forces team, ODA 316, worked in Konar province in 2004] receiving the letter from my father.

I had asked my father to send him a knife with “Sitting Bull” engraved on it—and a letter, man-to-man, father-to-father. Here is part of it:

“My son says you are a great warrior. He respects you and considers you to be his friend. He tells me that your enemies are his enemies. He says he would give his life to protect you. Be my son’s father while he is in your country. Take this gift from us as a token of our friendship.”

After I read the letter to Sitting Bull, he replied: “Tell your father not a hair on your head will be harmed as long as you are with me. You are now my son.”

It's all about relationships!

**SP:** Major Gant, if you could design an overall Tribal Engagement Plan, what sort of fires and forces would you deploy in reserve and what would their role be in relation to the TETs who were actually living with the tribes? Would ‘big army’ run patrols or operations? Would they serve as a Quick Reaction Force to back up the TETs? How would you envision the optimum situation?

**JG:** That ties into the above question. The overall security would absolutely have Close Air Support (CAS) planning considerations. Worst-case scenario, the TET could get air coverage in six hours, four hours or whatever, which will then be plugged back into the TET’s overall security plan. The TET would know long in advance what size and type of Aerial Quick Reaction Force was available, with worst-case scenario times for them as well. This information would once again be plugged back into the overall security plan.

In the end, what the TET would come up with is a security plan that says we know we have to hold them off for (fill in the blank) amount of time before we can get any CAS, and we must hold them off for (fill in the blank) amount of time before U.S. soldiers are hitting a pre-planned HLZ (Helicopter Landing Zone) off-loading troops. Yes, securing an HLZ would be part of the plan. This security plan would be very well rehearsed and executed many times with the tribesmen taking the lead in the fight for their villages and tribal area.

On a larger scale, my paper “One Tribe at a Time” discusses that what I am trying to accomplish with the TET, in relation to everyone else outside the tribe, is synergism. The “battle space owner”—meaning the main-force U.S. unit and its commanders in whose AO (Area of Operations) the TET is working—would have to be completely aware and support what the TET was trying to do. The TET would draw in all the other units in the area to help support the goals of the tribe, while also supporting the goals and objectives of the other Coalition Force units in the area, as well as looking for every opportunity for the district, regional, and central governments to aid the tribe, or for the tribe to aid the government.

Just a couple of days ago, I spoke with a trusted friend who is Special Forces. He pointed out the importance of building systems within the tribe that will be able to accept outside help if and when it

**Think about the ramifications of a 500-pound bomb being dropped on the tribal leader's daughter's home, killing her, her husband and their four kids.**  
**The TET could end up hanging from ropes in the village square.**

comes—whether it is from the government or NGOs. It would also include close contact with the Ministry of Tribal and Border Affairs to help facilitate concerns and grievances.

To the point of the question, ideally the tribal area would be turned into a Joint Special Operations Area (JSOA) or what I think they now are calling an “Operations Box,” where everyone and anyone who wanted to pass through the area, with either land or air forces, would have to get approval from the TET on the ground. This may seem extreme, but think about a main-force U.S. unit conducting a raid on a tribal elder based on bad intelligence (it DOES happen).

Then what? We lose 15 months of relationship and capacity building overnight. Think about the ramifications of a 500-pound bomb being dropped on the tribal leader's daughter's home, killing her, her husband and their four kids. The TET could end up hanging from ropes in the village square. That tribal area would have to belong to the TET. “Special trust and approval” would have to be used when dealing with the TET and supporting them in determining what types of operations could and could not be conducted in their “OP Box.”

**SP:** It's clear from the newspapers that President Obama is getting close to making his decision about whether or not to give Gen. McChrystal the additional troops the general has asked for—or possibly choosing to send some fraction, half, two-thirds, whatever. If a TES is implemented—even as a pilot program, an experiment in one or two provinces,

**General McChrystal recently said, “... this fight is for the Afghan people, it's not with the Afghan people. It's to protect the Afghan people.**  
**And so I think that has to be foremost in how we operate.”**

or part of a single province—how do you think that would impact the need for further American troops?

**JG:** I know this: If General McChrystal thinks we need more troops, then we need more troops. To fight the war in Afghanistan under the same type of COIN model that has turned out to be successful in Iraq (although comparing Iraq and Afghanistan is very dangerous), there must be more troops.

But I also believe that a seriously-applied Tribal Engagement Strategy will free up some of the troops that the generals need in other places, doing other things. One of the reasons I believe it is so attractive is that it is an “economy of force” mission with Afghans taking the lead from Day One.

General McChrystal recently said, “... this fight is for the Afghan people, it's not with the Afghan people. It's to protect the Afghan people. And so I think that has to be foremost in how we operate.”

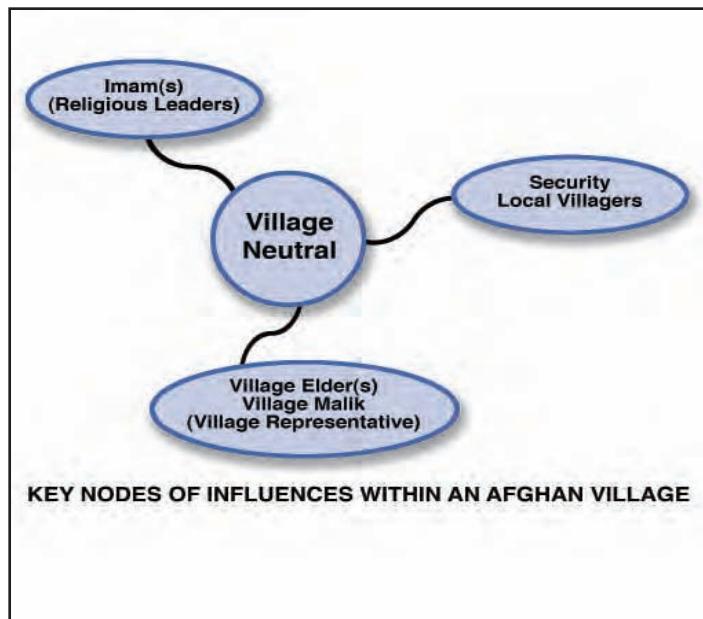
I believe that this Tribal Engagement Strategy, with the use of small, well-trained U.S. teams, will not only meet the General's intent, but will help provide the basis for long-term “success” in large portions of Afghanistan.

# How the Taliban Take a Village

Mark Sexton  
7 December 2009

## INTRODUCTION

A current method used by Taliban in Afghanistan, in order to gain control of an area deemed of strategic interest to the Taliban leadership operating from safe havens in Pakistan or within Afghanistan, is to identify and target villages to subvert. The Taliban have recognized the necessity to operate with the cooperation of the local population with the modus operandi being to gain their cooperation through indoctrination (preferred) or coercion (when necessary).



## VILLAGE NODES OF INFLUENCE

For a non-Afghan or foreigner to understand how the Taliban can subvert a village, we can use a simple social structure model to identify the key nodes of influence within a typical Afghan village. A village can be divided into three areas that most affect how daily life is lived. These areas generally fall under political and administrative, religious, and security. These three areas can be considered key nodes of influence in every Afghan village. Of the three nodes the one that is the most visible to outsiders is that of the Malik and

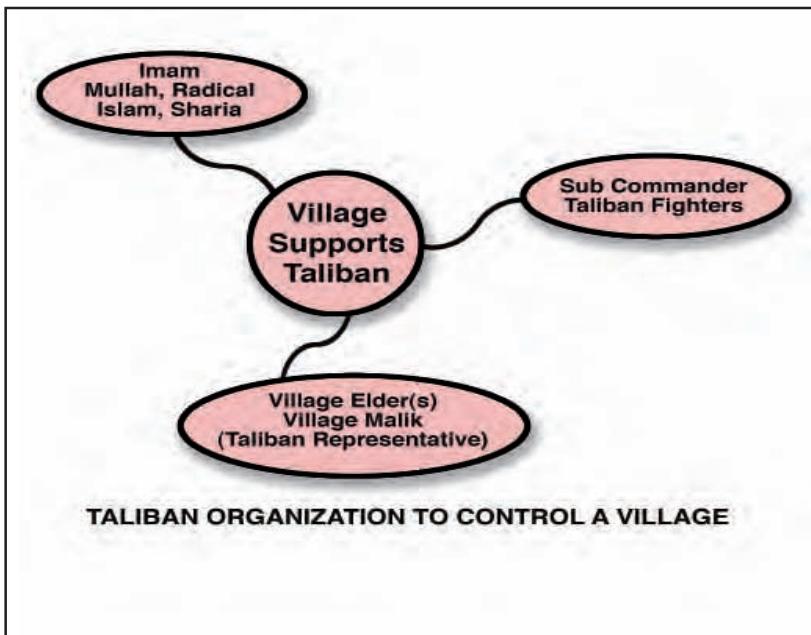
village elders. The Malik and village elders represent the political aspects of the village. A second key node of influence is the Imam. The Imam represents the religious node of influence within a village. A third local node of influence is the individuals and system of security found within a village. Security is traditionally conducted by the men of each individual village. If one of the parts or nodes of influence in each village is controlled by either the Taliban or Afghan government, then they heavily influence or control the village and the area.

## TALIBAN CONTROL OF VILLAGE NODES

The Taliban look for villages and areas which they can operate within and use as a base against United States (US) and Afghan forces. Areas with little US presence, or Afghan police or army presence, are prime areas the Taliban will initially seek to subvert and hold. The Taliban build networks by getting a fighter, religious leader, or village elder to support them.

Whichever one or more are initially used will be exploited by tribal and familial ties. The village politics administered by the elders and represented by an appointed Malik are the most identifiable node of influence of any particular village. The Taliban will attempt to sway those Maliks who are not supportive by discussion and if necessary threats, violence, or death. In villages where the locals say there is no Malik it is usually described as a convenience to the village as "no one wants the position," or sometimes "the elders cannot agree on a Malik so it is better there is none." In these cases it is most likely that the Taliban have neutralized the desired representative of that village. When locals are pressed for a representative they will give you a name of a person who has come to represent the village. This individual will also most likely be in support of and supported by the Taliban. The Taliban will try to install a Malik or "representative of the village" by coercion or force.

A “sub-commander” will be established in the village to keep in line those who would resist the Taliban or their Malik, who will be supported by limited funding. The sub-commander will generally have two to five fighters under his control. The fighters will often be armed only with small arms and rocket propelled grenades. They may or may not have an improvised explosive device (IED) capability, and if not will coordinate IED activities for the defense and (when possible) offense against US and Afghan forces. These fighters may stay



in the village but preferably are not from the village. Locals can sometimes be pressed into service to fight when needed, but the Taliban tend to use fighters from different villages so when threats or physical violence are utilized it won't be kinsman against kinsman. The Imam and local mosques of villages are often visited by the Taliban. This is not generally opposed by villagers as it is expected that even the Taliban must be allowed to perform and express their Islamic duties. These mosque visits afford the Taliban opportunities to gauge village sentiment and to build and establish contacts within localities. Village religious leaders also serve to educate children in villages where the Taliban have either closed or destroyed the local school. The mosque and Imam serve as an education center for the Taliban, while still presenting an opportunity for village children to be “educated.” This presents a solution to the unpopular notion of schools being closed. A constant and recognized complaint from the Afghan people is the lack of opportunity because of poor education. The Taliban will supplant the local Imam, if needed,

by supplying their own to a village. A village with no Imam will receive one and the Taliban will establish a mosque. This mosque will serve as a meeting place for Taliban, storage facility, and indoctrination center.

Sympathetic locals are used as auxiliaries to provide food and shelter. One way to do this is for known supporters to place food and blankets outside their living quarters or in guest quarters to be used by Taliban in transit or operating within a village. This gives the resident supporter some cover of deniability. When US or Afghan forces arrive all that is found are the blanket, possibly clothing, footprints, and other signs of their visit. The Taliban have blended into the surrounding village.

### TALIBAN CAN CONTROL WITH FEW FIGHTERS

The Taliban method requires relatively few of their own personnel. Its strength is in the local subversion of the most basic levels of village organization and life. It is also a decentralized approach. Guidance is given and then carried out with commanders applying their own interpretation of how to proceed. The goal is to control the village, and at the local level the only effective method which must be used by all commanders, is to control what we have termed the nodes of influence. Form fits function: an Afghan village can only work one way to allow its members to survive a subsistence agrarian lifestyle, and the Taliban know it well.

To control an area the Taliban will identify villages that can be most easily subverted. They will then spread to other villages in the area one at a time, focusing their efforts on whichever node of influence seems most likely to support their effort first. Using this model the Taliban could influence and dominate or control a valley or area with a population of 1000-2500 -- of ten villages with 100-250 people (100-250 compounds) -- with only between 20-50 active fighters and 10 fighting leaders. The actual numbers may be more population and fewer fighters.

The Taliban will have an elaborate network to support their fighters in areas they control or dominate. They will have safe houses, medical clinics, supply sites, weapons caches, transportation agents, and early warning

networks to observe and report. The US and Afghan forces, heavily laden with excessive body armor and equipment, are reluctant to leave their vehicles. They are blown up on the same roads and paths on which they entered the area. The Taliban will use feints and lures to draw our forces away from caches and leaders in an attempt to buy them time to relocate, or guide them into a lethal ambush. After the attack, the Taliban will disperse and blend into the village. The village will usually sustain civilian casualties, and the information or propaganda will be spread of US and Afghan forces using excessive force. The US and Afghan forces will leave or set up an outpost nearby, but the attacks will continue because the forces are not in the village, do not truly know "who's who in the zoo," and aren't able to effectively engage Taliban personnel or effectively interface with the village nodes of influence to their benefit.

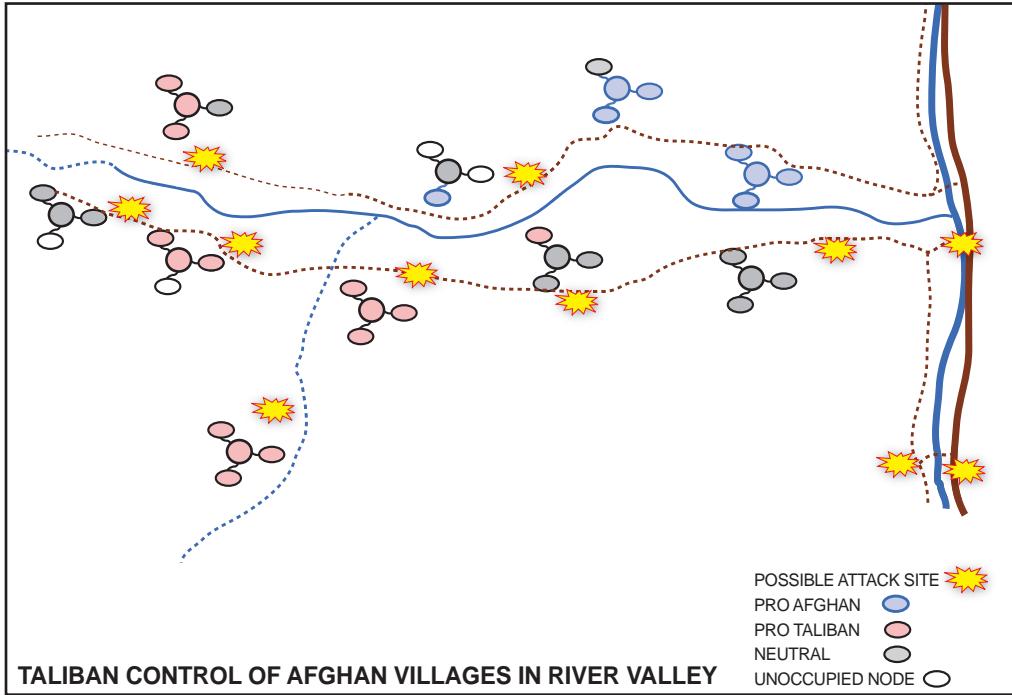
We say one thing, but our actions are different. Locals are reluctant to help because to be seen talking with the Americans and Afghan security forces will result in a visit from a Taliban member to determine what they talked about and to whom. The local villagers know the government has no effective plan that can counter the Taliban in their village and will typically only give information on Taliban or criminal elements to settle a blood feud. The Pashto people are patient to obtain justice and will use what they have to pay back "blood for blood" even against the Taliban.

## COUNTERING THE TALIBAN IN THE VILLAGE

Countering Taliban subversion of the populace is not done effectively with just more troops located at outposts. The troops must coordinate their activities with the local population and establish security through and within the village. When US and Afghan forces do this, the fight will typically take on a particularly violent aspect and involve the population as the Taliban attempt to maintain control.

The US and Afghan forces and Government will need to identify individuals to use lethal and non-lethal targeting. This requires in-depth knowledge of tribal structure, alliances, and feuds. Viable alternatives or choices need to be available to village leaders and villagers. Just placing US and Afghan soldiers at an outpost and conducting token presence patrols, and occasionally bantering with locals and organizing a shura once a month, are not going to work.

Afghan identity is not primarily national, that is, belonging within a geographic boundary with a centralized national government. Afghan identity is tribal in nature. Americans view identity as a national government, in the villages Afghans do not. The tribe is most important. The country "Afghanistan" running things from Kabul does not mean very much to the Afghan people in the villages under duress from the Taliban.



US and Afghan forces must be able to infiltrate and shape the village nodes of influence and then target individuals. Right now our military embraces a centralized, top-driven approach that prevents our military and US-trained Afghan counterparts from doing so. Current US procedures and tactics attempt to identify the Taliban without regard to their influence or social role at the village level. Instead, we attempt to link

individuals to attacks and incomplete network structures through often questionable intelligence. The individuals in nodes of influence must be identified as neutral, pro-, or anti-Afghan government and then dealt with. To target any other way is haphazard at best and does not gain us the initiative.

US and Afghan forces must also devise and utilize tactics to fight outside and inside the village. This requires true light infantry and real counterinsurgency tactics employed by troops on the ground, not read from a “new” counterinsurgency (COIN) manual by leadership in a support base. The tactics must entail lightly equipped and fast-moving COIN forces that go into villages and know how to properly interact with locals and identify Taliban insurgents. They must have the ability to take their time and stay in areas they have identified at the local level as worth trying to take back. Being moved from place to place and using armored vehicles, while hardly reengaging local leadership, will not work.

Targeting identified high-value targets will only result in the “whack-a-mole” syndrome. It’s demoralizing for US and Afghan troops, the American public, and the Afghans who just want to live in peace. A light infantry force conducting specialized reconnaissance in villages, and using proven tactics like trained visual trackers to follow insurgents into and out of villages, proper ambush techniques on foot outside the village, and knowing the local village situation are the key. Infantry tactics should also use vertical envelopment of Taliban fighters by helicopter and parachute to cut off avenues of escape. Troops should conduct foot patrols into villages at night, talk with and document compounds and inhabitants for later analysis, and have a secure patrol base locally from which to operate. Mega bases or forward operating bases (FOB) are only for support, and units and tactics should be decentralized.

Written by Mark Sexton: This analysis is the opinion of the author and does not represent the Department of Defense, US Army, or any other state or federal government agency.

<http://globalguerrillas.typepad.com/lind/2009/12/on-war-325-how-the-taliban-take-a-village-lindsexton.html>

#### About the Author:

Mark Sexton has completed two deployments to Operation Enduring Freedom with Special Forces as a weapons sergeant and as an assistant operations and intelligence NCO. He has also worked as a private contractor on the security detail to the US Ambassador to Afghanistan, and as a mentor and trainer to the Afghan Presidential Protective Detail for President Karzai.

**William Lind Note:** The above article is a guest column, written by Mark Sexton, a reserve noncommissioned officer with Special Forces. It is based on his personal observations in Afghanistan. It represents his analysis only, not any position taken by DOD, the US Army, or any other agency of the US Government. In my opinion, it represents exactly the sort of intelligence analysis we need but seldom get. This article reprinted with permission of the author and William Lind. It was originally posted on Mr. Lind’s website as “On War #325.”

# Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan

Major General Michael T. Flynn, USA

Captain Matt Pottinger, USMC

Paul D. Batchelor, DIA

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper, written by the senior intelligence officer in Afghanistan and by a company-grade officer and a senior executive with the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), critically examines the relevance of the US intelligence community to the counterinsurgency [COIN] strategy in Afghanistan. Based on discussions with hundreds of people inside and outside the intelligence community, it recommends sweeping changes to the way the intelligence community thinks about itself – from a focus on the enemy to a focus on the people of Afghanistan. The paper argues that because the United States has focused the overwhelming majority of collection efforts and analytical brainpower on insurgent groups, our intelligence apparatus still finds itself unable to answer fundamental questions about the environment in which we operate and the people we are trying to protect and persuade.

This problem or its consequences exist at every level of the US intelligence hierarchy, and pivotal information is not making it to those who need it. To quote General Stanley McChrystal in a recent meeting, “Our senior leaders – the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense, Congress, the President of the United States – are not getting the right information to make decisions with ... The media is driving the issues. We need to build a process from the sensor all the way to the political decision makers.” This is a need that spans the 44 nations involved with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

This paper is the blueprint for that process. It describes the problem, details the changes and illuminates examples of units that are “getting it right.” It is aimed at commanders as well as intelligence professionals, in Afghanistan and in the United States and Europe.

Among the initiatives Major General Flynn directs:

- Select teams of analysts will be empowered to move between field elements, much like journalists, to visit collectors of information at the grassroots

level and carry that information back with them to the regional command level.

- These items will integrate information collected by civil affairs officers, provincial reconstruction teams (PRT), atmospherics teams, Afghan liaison officers, female engagement teams, willing non-governmental organizations and development organizations, United Nations officials, psychological operations teams, human terrain teams, and infantry battalions, to name a few.
- These analysts will divide their work along geographic lines, instead of along functional lines, and write comprehensive district assessments covering governance, development and stability. The alternative – having all analysts study an entire province or region through the lens of a narrow, functional line (e.g., one analyst covers governance, another studies narcotics trafficking, a third looks at insurgent networks, etc.) – isn’t working.
- The analysts will provide all the data they gather to teams of “information brokers” at the regional command level who will organize and disseminate – proactively and on request – all the reports and data gathered at the grassroots level.
- These special teams of analysts and information brokers will work in what the authors are calling Stability Operations Information Centers. (The authors discuss how these information centers cooperate with, and in some cases replace, “fusion centers”.)
- These information centers will be placed under and in cooperation with the State Department’s senior civilian representatives administering governance, development and stability efforts in Regional Commands East and South.
- Leaders must put time and energy into selecting the best, most extroverted and hungriest analysts to serve in the stability operations information centers. These will be among the most challenging and rewarding jobs an analyst could tackle.

The highly complex environment in Afghanistan requires an adaptive way of thinking and operating. Just as the old rules of warfare may no longer apply, a new way of leveraging and applying the informa-

*tion spectrum requires substantive improvements. The ISAF Joint Command (IJC) under the leadership of Lieutenant General David M. Rodriguez has made some recent innovative strides with the advent of the “information dominance center.” This type of innovation must be mirrored to the degree possible at multiple levels of command and back in our intelligence community structures in the United States. In no way is this a perfect solution and the United States will continue to adapt. However, the United States must constantly change our way of operating and thinking if we want to win.*

**E**ight years into the war in Afghanistan, the US intelligence community is only marginally relevant to the overall strategy. Having focused the overwhelming majority of its collection efforts and analytical brain-power on insurgent groups, the vast intelligence apparatus is unable to answer fundamental questions about the environment in which US and allied forces operate and the people they seek to persuade. Ignorant of local economics and landowners, hazy about who the powerbrokers are and how they might be influenced, incurious about the correlations between various development projects and the levels of cooperation among villagers, and disengaged from people in the best position to find answers – whether aid workers or Afghan soldiers – US intelligence officers and analysts can do little but shrug in response to high level decision-makers seeking the knowledge, analysis, and information they need to wage a successful counterinsurgency.

This problem and its consequences exist at every level of the US intelligence hierarchy, from ground operations up to headquarters in Kabul and the United States. At the battalion level and below, intelligence officers know a great deal about their local Afghan districts but are generally too understaffed to gather, store, disseminate, and digest the substantial body of crucial information that exists outside traditional intelligence channels. A battalion S-2 shop will, as it should, carefully read and summarize classified human intelligence (HUMINT), signals intelligence (SIGINT), and significant activity (SIGACT) reports that describe improvised explosive device (IED) strikes and other violent incidents. These three types of reports deal primarily with the enemy and, as such, are necessary and appropriate elements of intelligence.

What lies beyond them is another issue. Lacking sufficient numbers of analysts and guidance from

commanders, battalion S-2 shops rarely gather, process, and write up quality assessments on countless items, such as: census data and patrol debriefs; minutes from shuras with local farmers and tribal leaders; after-action reports from civil affairs officers and PRTs; polling data and atmospherics reports from psychological operations and female engagement teams; and translated summaries of radio broadcasts that influence local farmers, not to mention the field observations of Afghan soldiers, United Nations officials, and non-governmental organizations (NGO). This vast and underappreciated body of information, almost all of which is unclassified, admittedly offers few clues about where to find insurgents, but it does provide elements of even greater strategic importance – a map for leveraging popular support and marginalizing the insurgency itself.

The tendency to overemphasize detailed information about the enemy at the expense of the political, economic, and cultural environment that supports it becomes even more pronounced at the brigade and regional command levels. Understandably galled by IED strikes that are killing soldiers, these intelligence shops react by devoting most of their resources to finding the people who emplace such devices. Analysts painstakingly diagram insurgent networks and recommend individuals who should be killed or captured. Aerial drones and other collection assets are tasked with scanning the countryside around the clock in the hope of spotting insurgents burying bombs or setting up ambushes. Again, these are fundamentally worthy objectives, but relying on them exclusively baits intelligence shops into reacting to enemy tactics at the expense of finding ways to strike at the very heart of the insurgency. These labor-intensive efforts, employed in isolation, fail to advance the war strategy and, as a result, expose more troops to danger over the long run. Overlooked amid these reactive intelligence efforts are two inescapable truths: 1) brigade and regional command analytic products, in their present form, tell ground units little they do not already know; and 2) lethal targeting alone will not help US and allied forces win in Afghanistan.

Speaking to the first point, enemy-centric and counter-IED reports published by higher commands are of little use to warfighters in the field, most of whom already grasp who it is they are fighting and, in many cases, are the sources of the information in the reports in the first place. Some battalion S-2 officers say they acquire more information that is helpful by

reading US newspapers than through reviewing regional command intelligence summaries. Newspaper accounts, they point out, discuss more than the enemy and IEDs. What battalion S-2 officers want from higher-up intelligence shops are additional analysts, who would be more productive working at the battalion and company levels. The same applies to collection efforts. Officers in the field believe that the emphasis on force protection missions by spy planes and other non-HUMINT platforms should be balanced with collection and analysis of population-centric information. Is that desert road we're thinking of paving really the most heavily trafficked route? Which mosques and bazaars attract the most people from week to week? Is that local contractor actually implementing the irrigation project we paid him to put into service? These are the kinds of questions, beyond those concerning the enemy as such, which military and civilian decision-makers in the field need help answering. They elicit the information and solutions that foster the cooperation of local people who are far better than outsiders at spotting insurgents and their bombs and providing indications and warnings "left of boom" (before IEDs blow up).

The second inescapable truth asserts that merely killing insurgents usually serves to multiply enemies rather than subtract them. This counterintuitive dynamic is common in many guerrilla conflicts and is especially relevant in the revenge-prone Pashtun communities whose cooperation military forces seek to earn and maintain. The Soviets experienced this reality in the 1980s, when despite killing hundreds of thousands of Afghans, they faced a larger insurgency near the end of the war than they did at the beginning.

Given these two lessons, we must ask why, out of the hundreds of intelligence analysts working in brigade-level and regional command-level headquarters, only a minuscule fraction study governance, development, and local populations – all topics that must be understood in order to prevail. "Why the Intel Fusion Center can't give me data about the population is beyond me," remarked the operations officer of one US task force, echoing a common complaint: "I don't want to say we're clueless, but we are. We're no more than finger-nail deep in our understanding of the environment." If brigade and regional command intelligence sections were profit-oriented businesses, far too many would now be "belly up."

The next level up represents the top of the intelligence pyramid. Dozens of intelligence analysts in Kabul,

along with hundreds more back in Tampa, Florida, at the Pentagon, and throughout the Washington, DC area, are committed to answering critically important questions about the state of the conflict in Afghanistan and the impact of US and allied military actions. They seek to respond to the queries posed by US Forces-Afghanistan and ISAF Commanding General Stanley McChrystal, Lieutenant General David M. Rodriguez of the ISAF Joint Command, and other decision-makers, up to and including the President of the United States. Their answers are essential to making informed strategic decisions.

The problem is that these analysts – the core of them bright, enthusiastic, and hungry – are starved for information from the field, so starved, in fact, that many say their jobs feel more like fortune telling than serious detective work. In a recent project ordered by the White House, analysts could barely scrape together enough information to formulate rudimentary assessments of pivotal Afghan districts. It is little wonder, then, that many decision-makers rely more upon newspapers than military intelligence to obtain "ground truth." While there is nothing wrong with utilizing credible information gathered by reporters, to restrict decision-makers so narrowly when deep and wide intelligence information is available shortchanges military personnel and needlessly jeopardizes the successful prosecution of the Afghanistan war.

Ironically, the barriers to maximizing available intelligence are surprisingly few. The deficit of data needed by high-level analysts does not arise from a lack of reporting in the field. There are literally terabytes of unclassified and classified information typed up at the grassroots level. Nor, remarkably, is the often-assumed unwillingness to share information the core of the problem. On the contrary, military officers and civilians working with ISAF allies, and even many NGOs, are eager to exchange information. True, there are severe technological hurdles, such as the lack of a common database and digital network available to all partners, but they are not insurmountable.

The most salient problems are attitudinal, cultural, and human. The intelligence community's standard mode of operation is surprisingly passive about aggregating information that is not enemy-related and relaying it to decision-makers or fellow analysts further up the chain. It is a culture that is strangely oblivious of how little its analytical products, as they now exist, actually influence commanders.

It is also a culture that is emphatic about secrecy but regrettably less concerned about mission effectiveness.<sup>1</sup> To quote General McChrystal in a recent meeting, “Our senior leaders – the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense, Congress, the President of the United States – are not getting the right information to make decisions with. We must get this right. The media is driving the issues. We need to build a process from the sensor all the way to the political decision makers.”

This document is the blueprint for such a process.

The authors of this document outline changes that must occur throughout the intelligence hierarchy. Its contents should be considered as a directive by the senior author, who is the top intelligence officer in Afghanistan. We chose to embody it in this unconventional report, and are taking the steps to have it published by a respected think tank, in order to broaden its reach to commanders, intelligence professionals and schoolhouse instructors outside, as well as inside, Afghanistan. Some of what is presented here reinforces existing top-level orders that are being acted on too slowly. Other initiatives in this paper are new, requiring a shift in emphasis and a departure from the comfort zone of many in the intelligence community.

We will illuminate examples of superb intelligence work being done at various levels by people who are, indeed, “getting it right.” We will explain what civilian analysts and military intelligence officers back in the US must do in order to prepare, and what organizational changes they should anticipate. (As an example, some civilian analysts who deploy to Afghanistan will be empowered to move between field elements in order to personally visit the collectors of information at the grassroots level and carry that information back with them. Analysts’ Cold War habit of sitting back and waiting for information to fall into their laps does not work in today’s warfare and must end.)

We will devote substantial attention to the changes that must occur at the regional command level so that intelligence professionals can serve as clearinghouses of information and comprehensive analysis. Many of these reforms will occur immediately, others will take more time. All are realistic and attainable.

In addition to reflecting the thinking of the war’s senior intelligence officer, this memorandum combines the perspectives of a company-grade officer and a senior

executive with the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) who have consulted the views of hundreds of people inside and outside the intelligence community before putting pen to paper.

This memorandum is aimed at commanders as well as intelligence professionals. If intelligence is to help us succeed in the conduct of the war, the commanders of companies, battalions, brigades, and regions must clearly prioritize the questions they need answered in support of our counterinsurgency strategy, direct intelligence officials to answer them, and hold accountable those who fail.

Too often, the secretiveness of the intelligence community has allowed it to escape the scrutiny of customers and the supervision of commanders. Too often, when an S-2 officer fails to deliver, he is merely ignored rather than fired. It is hard to imagine a battalion or regimental commander tolerating an operations officer, communications officer, logistics officer, or adjutant who fails to perform his or her job. But, except in rare cases, ineffective intel officers are allowed to stick around. American military doctrine established long before this war began could hardly be clearer on this point: *“Creating effective intelligence is an inherent and essential responsibility of command.* Intelligence failures are failures of command – [just] as operations failures are command failures.”

Nowhere does our group suggest that there is not a significant role for intelligence to play in finding, fixing, and finishing off enemy leaders. What we conclude is there must be a concurrent effort under the ISAF commander’s strategy to acquire and provide knowledge about the population, the economy, the government, and other aspects of the dynamic environment we are trying to shape, secure, and successfully leave behind. Until now, intelligence efforts in this area have been token and ineffectual, particularly at the regional command level. Simply put, the stakes are too high for the stability of Afghanistan and Pakistan, for NATO’s [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] credibility, and for US national security for us to fail in our intelligence mission. The urgent task before us is to make our intelligence community not only stronger but, in a word, “relevant.”\*

[\*The intelligence community referred to throughout this document is the thousands of uniformed and civilian intelligence personnel serving with the Department of Defense and with joint inter-agency elements in Afghanistan.]

## **ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL: TACTICAL INTEL EQUALS STRATEGIC INTEL**

Why would four-star generals, and even the Secretary General of NATO and the President of the United States, require detailed district-level information and assessments on Afghanistan? For many in the intelligence chain of command, the answer, regrettably, is “they don’t.” Intelligence officers at the regional commands and below contend that the focus of higher echelons should be limited to Afghanistan’s large provinces and the nation as a whole – the “operational and strategic levels” – and not wander “into the weeds” of Afghan districts at the “tactical level.” In fact, top decision-makers and their staffs emphatically do need to understand the sub-national situation down to the district level. For the most part, this is precisely where we are fighting the war, which means, inevitably, this is where it will be won or lost.

One of the peculiarities of guerrilla warfare is that tactical-level information is laden with strategic significance far more than in conventional conflicts. This blurring of the line between strategic and tactical is already widely appreciated by infantrymen.<sup>3</sup> They use the term “strategic corporal” to describe how the actions of one soldier can have broader implications – for example, when the accidental killing of civilians sparks anti-government riots in multiple cities.

The tactical and the strategic overlap in the information realm, too. If relations suddenly were to sour between US troops and an influential tribe on the outskirts of Kandahar, public confidence in the government’s ability to hold the entire city might easily, and predictably, falter. In such a situation, the imperative to provide top Afghan and ISAF leaders with details about the tribal tension and its likely causes is clear. Leaders at the national level may be the only ones with the political and military leverage to decisively preempt a widening crisis.

Consider another example. Development officials earn goodwill through small-scale but quick irrigation projects in one district, while officials in a neighboring district see little public enthusiasm as they proceed with an expensive but slowly developing road construction project. Policymakers in Europe and the United States need the “nitty-gritty” details of these projects to detect the reasons for their different outcomes and to assess whether similar patterns exist with projects elsewhere in the province. In short, strategy is about making difficult choices with limited people, money and time. The

information necessary to guide major policy choices, for better or for worse, resides at the grassroots level.

To understand the dynamics of this process, it is useful to think of the Afghanistan war as a political campaign, albeit a violent one. If an election campaign spent all of its effort attacking the opposition and none figuring out which districts were undecided, which were most worthy of competing for, and what specific messages were necessary to sway them, the campaign would be destined to fail. No serious contender for the American presidency ever confined himself or herself solely to the “strategic” level of a campaign, telling the staff to worry only about the national and regional picture and to leave individual counties and election districts entirely in the hands of local party organizers, disconnected from the overall direction of the campaign. In order to succeed, a candidate’s pollsters and strategists (the equivalent of a J-2 staff) must constantly explore the local levels, including voters’ grievances, leanings, loyalties, and activities. Experienced campaign strategists understand that losing even one or two key districts can mean overall defeat. (Recall, for example, the defining impact of two Florida counties – Miami-Dade and Palm Beach – on the national outcome of the 2000 presidential election.) To paraphrase former Speaker of the House Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill’s famous quote, “all counterinsurgency is local.”

Information gathering in a counterinsurgency differs from information gathering in a conventional war in another important respect. In a conventional conflict, ground units depend heavily on intelligence from higher commands to help them navigate the fog of war. Satellites, spy planes, and more arcane assets controlled by people far from the battlefield inform ground units about the strength, location, and activity of the enemy before the ground unit even arrives. Information flows largely from the top down.

In a counterinsurgency, the flow is (or should be) reversed. The soldier or development worker on the ground is usually the person best informed about the environment and the enemy. Moving up through levels of hierarchy is normally a journey into greater degrees of cluelessness. This is why ground units, PRTs, and everyone close to the grassroots bears a double burden in a counterinsurgency; they are at once the most important consumers and suppliers of information. It is little wonder, then, given the flow and content of today’s intelligence, that they are seriously frustrated with higher commands. For them, the relationship feels like all “give” with little or nothing in return.

While there is no way around the ground operator's burden – and duty – to send large quantities of information up the chain of command, there are ways for higher command elements to improve their integrated reciprocation. One is to send analysts to the ground level, whether on a permanent or temporary-but-recurring basis, to help already-busy PRTs and S-2 shops collate information and disseminate it accordingly.

A second way is to ensure that higher-level analysts are creating comprehensive narratives by pulling together all aspects of what occurs in the field. Brigade and regional command intelligence summaries that regurgitate the previous day's enemy activity tell ground units little they do not already know. But periodic narratives that describe changes in the economy, atmospherics, development, corruption, governance, and enemy activity in a given district provide the kind of context that is invaluable up the chain of command and back down to the district itself. (We examine these two methods further in the section on regional commands.) Reforms of this kind have not only immediate, practical value, but also the potential to catalyze a more powerful, relevant, and holistic intelligence system.

### ***INTEL AT THE GRASSROOTS: THE BATTALION AND BELOW***

In late June 2009, a small number of US Marines and British soldiers were the only foreign forces in Nawa, a district of 70,000 farmers in Afghanistan's Helmand province. The American and British troops could not venture a kilometer from their cramped base without confronting machine gun and rocket fire from insurgents. Local farmers, wary of reprisals by the Taliban, refused to make eye contact with foreign soldiers, much less speak with them or offer valuable battlefield and demographic information.

The tide began to turn in Nawa on July 2, when 800 Marines descended in helicopters and began sweeping across the district on foot, establishing nearly two dozen patrol bases in villages and cornfields along the way. Five months later and with few shots fired by Marines after their initial operation, the situation in Nawa is radically different. Insurgents find it substantially more difficult to operate without being ostracized or reported by farmers; government officials meet regularly with citizens to address their grievances, removing this powerful instrument of local control from the Taliban's arsenal; the district center has transformed from a ghost town into a bustling bazaar; and IED

incidents are down 90 percent. Nawa's turnaround, although still fragile, could not have occurred without population-centric counterinsurgency techniques. This evolution illustrates the pivotal role intelligence plays when a battalion commits itself to understanding the environment at least as well as it understands the enemy.

The men of 1st Battalion, 5th Marines who fanned out across the district that hot July morning had to operate with no more supplies than they could carry on their backs. For weeks, they had no hardened bases, little electricity, and only radios for communication. The battalion S-2 and deputy intelligence officers, finding their unit widely dispersed across an alien environment without classified or unclassified data networks, responded with two particularly farsighted decisions. First, they distributed their intelligence analysts down to the company level, and second, they decided that understanding the people in their zone of influence was a top priority.

By resisting the urge of many intelligence officers to hoard analysts at the command post, the S-2 and his deputy armed themselves with a network of human sensors who could debrief patrols, observe key personalities and terrain across the district, and – crucially – write down their findings. Because there were not enough analysts to send to every platoon, the infantry companies picked up the slack by assigning riflemen to collate and analyze information fulltime.<sup>4</sup>

While the concept of forming mini S-2 shops at the company level is not new (the Army calls them Company Intelligence Support Teams; Marines call them Company-Level Intelligence Cells), it is uncommon for them to be staffed with more than a pair of junior soldiers. First Battalion, Fifth Marines saw things differently. Alpha Company, for instance, dedicated five non-commissioned officers to their intelligence cell.

The battalion intelligence officers refused to allow the absence of a data network to impede the flow of information. Each night, the deputy intelligence officer hosted what he called "fireside chats," during which each analyst radioed in from his remote position at a designated time and read aloud everything learned over the last 24 hours. Using this approach, daily reports incorporated a wide variety of sources: unclassified patrol debriefs; the notes of officers who had met with local leaders; the observations of civil affairs officers;

and classified HUMINT reports. The deputy intelligence officer typed up a master report of everything called in by analysts and closed each “chat session” by providing them with an updated list of questions – called “intelligence requirements” – for the companies to attempt to answer.<sup>5</sup>

In the earliest days of the operation, many of these questions dealt with basic logistical matters, such as the location and conditions of roads, bridges, mosques, markets, wells, and other key terrain. Once these were answered, however, the focus shifted to local residents and their perceptions. What do locals think about the insurgents? Do they feel safer or less safe with us around? What disputes exist between villages or tribes? As the picture sharpened, the focus honed in on identifying what the battalion called “anchor points” – local personalities and local grievances that, if skillfully exploited, could drive a wedge between insurgents and the greater population. In other words, anchor points represented the enemy’s critical vulnerabilities.

The battalion soon found one to exploit. Many local elders, it turned out, quietly resented the Taliban for threatening their traditional power structure. The Taliban was empowering young fighters and mullahs to replace local elders as the primary authorities on local economic and social matters. Despite this affront to the elders, they were too frightened to openly challenge the Taliban’s iron-fisted imposition.

Based on its integrated intelligence, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines took steps to subvert the Taliban power structure and to strengthen the elders’ traditional one. The battalion commander partnered with the district governor, traveling with him constantly and participating in impromptu meetings with citizens to build their confidence in Afghan and US security. To demonstrate the benefits of working with the Afghan government, the battalion facilitated development projects that addressed grievances identified through coordinated surveys of the populace by Marines and civilian officials. These efforts paid off. The district governor persuaded elders to reconstitute a traditional council featuring locally selected representatives from each sub-district. The council now serves as the primary advisory board to the Afghan government in Nawa.

To be sure, various chips had to fall the right way in order for our forces to enable this positive turn of events. Nawa was lucky to have a charismatic governor and a modern battalion commander who, together, ran their joint effort like a political campaign as much

as a military operation. The robust presence of security personnel (there was one Marine or Afghan soldier or policeman for every 50 citizens) was also vital.<sup>6</sup>

But the battalion’s intelligence effort was equally decisive. Battalion leadership understood that driving a wedge between the people and the insurgents would advance the US-Afghan mission, and it geared its intelligence toward understanding the environment, knowing this would ultimately make Marines safer than would over-concentrating on the IED threat. Crucially, the battalion commander took an active role in feeding and guiding the collection effort. His priority intelligence requirements, which he frequently updated, asked who the local powerbrokers were and what social dynamics were ripe for exploitation. A visitor to the district center of Nawa last June, before the battalion arrived, would today not recognize the bustling marketplace. Farmers who last summer would have said nothing upon spotting the Taliban burying a roadside bomb now chase them away themselves.

First Battalion, Fifth Marines is hardly the only unit to get it right. The 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment set a similar example in the socially complex eastern provinces of Nuristan and Kunar by relentlessly engaging elders and strengthening traditional power structures, thereby deflating the local insurgency. The commander, then-Lieutenant Colonel Christopher D. Kolenda, had ordered his intelligence shop to support this effort by devoting their energy to understanding the social relationships, economic disputes, and religious and tribal leadership of the local communities. While more than 30 American and Afghan soldiers had been killed in this area during the five month period leading up to this new approach, only three were killed over the subsequent 12 months, from October 2007 to October 2008, as the approach bore fruit. “Intelligence is a commander’s responsibility,” Kolenda, now a colonel, said recently. “Intel automatically defaults to focusing on the enemy if the commander is not involved in setting priorities and explaining why they are important.”<sup>7</sup>

The ongoing work of 3rd Squadron, 71st Cavalry in Logar Province also serves as a beacon, as do the efforts of several other Army and Marine units. Our detailed review of the battalion in Nawa is intended to demonstrate how fully integrated counterinsurgency (“COIN”) intelligence under any command contributes to success in the conduct of the war. It is a lesson that needs to be understood and applied widely in order for us to succeed.

## **REGIMENTS AND BRIGADES MUST FIGHT TO BE RELEVANT**

Moving up the hierarchy, we examined regimental and brigade-level intelligence shops on large, forward-operating bases isolated from population centers. Although these bases are usually only a few dozen geographic miles from battalions, operationally they are worlds apart. Regimental and brigade-level shops face problems diametrically opposed to those of battalion S-2 shops. Resources are abundant; there are broadband classified and unclassified networks and technicians to keep them running, printers and map plotters that actually work, hot chow and showers, and, at least at the brigade-level, scores of military intelligence analysts. What they lack is what the battalions have in abundance – information about what is actually happening on the ground.

Brigade intelligence officers keep their analysts busy creating charts linking insurgents, building PowerPoint “storyboards” depicting violent incidents within the area of operations, and distilling intelligence summaries from units in the field. They direct their efforts toward keeping the brigade commander updated with news from the battlefield.

But the most competent regimental and brigade intelligence shops, according to the battalions they support, are the ones that do three specific things. First, they make every effort to advertise collection and production capabilities and to make these capabilities available to the battalions. Second, they send analysts down to augment battalion and company-level intelligence support teams even if only on a rotating basis. And third, they produce written summaries that incorporate everyone’s activities in the area of operations – civil affairs, PRTs, the Afghan government, and security forces – rather than merely rehashing kinetic incidents already covered in battalion-level intelligence summaries.

Battalion S-2 officers give high praise to brigade-level officers and NCOs who routinely determine what maps, imagery, surveillance, and SIGINT<sup>8</sup> support the battalions need. The hallmark of good regimental and brigade-level intelligence support is a proactive approach. Officers use telephones or show up in person to walk the battalion’s S-2 through the support they can provide, like tailors fitting a customer for a new suit.<sup>9</sup> Too often, battalion S-2s are in the dark about the full spectrum of collection platforms that can be tasked on their behalf by the brigade. And too often they are frustrated

to learn that these capabilities are devoted primarily to serving brigade staff rather than battalions in the field.

The regiments and brigades that do rotate their analysts down to the battalion and company levels benefit themselves as well as the units they support. Time spent by analysts away from the brigade is amply compensated by the knowledge they bring back, the personal contacts they establish and maintain, and the sense of urgency and equity they develop about the fight being waged at the ground level. They now personally know the soldiers going out on patrol each day, and as one would expect among fighting men and women, this makes a difference.

Ultimately, those regiments and brigades that embrace an ethos of supporting field units are the most effective. In a properly ordered intelligence system, competing demands on personnel and resources should be resolved in favor of supporting battalions rather than satisfying brigade-level projects. One intelligence officer, describing the adjustments he had to make after moving from a battalion S-2 to becoming a brigade-level intelligence officer, put it this way: “You are dramatically less relevant at the brigade level than you were in your previous job. At the higher level, you have to fight to be relevant in some way.” A major objective of this report is to help make the enormous resources available to brigades and regiments more relevant to sustaining the overall war effort.

## **COIN WARFARE CALLS FOR COIN ANALYSTS**

The success of the battalion in Nawa became known not through intelligence channels, but from reports by American news outlets. In our search for details, we were unable to find significant information in official reports and summaries reaching headquarters level. Ultimately, one of us had to fly to Nawa to get the full story in person. As an investigative effort, this is acceptable. As a coherent and effective intelligence system, it is a failure.

In the end, however, the Nawa anecdote is doubly instructive. While it demonstrates the extent to which the intelligence community above the battalion level is out of touch – officers are oblivious even to big successes in the field – it also offers clues about how to fix the problem.

To begin, commanders must authorize a select group of analysts to retrieve information from the ground level and make it available to a broader audience, similar to the way journalists work. These analysts must leave their chairs and visit the people who operate at the grassroots level – civil affairs officers, PRTs, atmospherics teams, Afghan liaison officers, female engagement teams, willing NGOs and development organizations, United Nations officials, psychological operations teams, human terrain teams, and staff officers with infantry battalions – to name a few.

People at the grassroots level already produce reams of reports and are willing to share them. Little of what they write, however, reaches Afghanistan's five regional commands, and even less reaches top decision-makers and analysts in Kabul and beyond. Some reports remain trapped at the ground level because of a lack of bandwidth, while others get pushed up only to be "stove-piped" in one of the many classified-and-disjointed networks that inevitably populate a 44-nation coalition. But even where there is a commonly available network, such as the unclassified Internet, little from the ground level in Afghanistan reaches a central repository where customers who need information can access or search for it. Instead, vital information piles up in obscure SharePoint sites, inaccessible hard drives, and other digital junkyards.

Although strenuous and costly efforts are underway to move to a common, classified network and to establish a few master databases, eight years of disunity has shown that technology alone is not the answer. To solve the problem, specially trained analysts must be empowered to methodically identify everyone who collects valuable information, visit them in the field, build mutually beneficial relationships with them, and bring back information to share with everyone who needs it.

This is easier to do in Afghanistan than it might appear. Helicopters routinely shuttle between PRTs and brigade and battalion headquarters, offering analysts what their predecessors in the Cold War and in conventional conflicts could only dream of – firsthand, in-person access to the ground-level environment they are analyzing. Information essential to the successful conduct of a counterinsurgency is ripe for retrieval, but analysts that remain confined to restricted-access buildings in Kabul or on Bagram and Kandahar Airfields cannot access it.

There are, of course, limits on how far analysts can or should go in pursuit of information. Concern for physical safety is one. Rules that govern the difference

between collection and analysis represent another. The plan we are advocating respects these boundaries. The idea is not to send civilians on combat patrols, but to deploy them in ways that allow them to function as analysts. Nor would they be "collectors" – a technical term denoting those authorized to elicit information from sensitive or covert sources. Rather, they would be information integrators, vacuuming up data already collected by military personnel or gathered by civilians in the public realm and bringing it back to a centralized location.

Once gathered, information must be read and understood. This select team of analysts would take the first pass at making sense of what they have gathered by writing periodic narrative reviews of all that is happening in pivotal districts: who the key personalities are, how local attitudes are changing, what the levels of violence are, how enemy tactics are evolving, why farmers chose to plant more wheat than poppy this winter, what development projects have historically occurred or are currently underway, and so on. Ideally, this would entail dividing their workload along geographic lines, instead of along functional lines, with each covering a handful of key districts.

The importance of an integrated, district-focused approach is difficult to overstate. The alternative – having all analysts study an entire province or region through the lens of a narrow, functional line (i.e., one analyst covers governance, another studies narcotics trafficking, a third looks at insurgent networks, etc) simply cannot produce meaningful analysis. Before analysts can draw useful conclusions along these specialized lines, they must first have comprehensive reviews of everything that is happening in the various districts. With rare exceptions, such written reviews do not exist currently.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, analysts throughout the intelligence hierarchy lack the necessary context and data needed to detect patterns of governance and other specialized topics across provinces and regions.

This approach may be novel to the current US military intelligence model, but it is not unusual in other information-dependent enterprises. Consider, for instance, the sports page of a metropolitan newspaper. When the editor assigns reporters to cover football, one covers the Jets and another covers the Giants. The editor does not tell the first to write about all NFL linebackers and the second to write about the league's punters. Determining whether teams have a shot at the Super Bowl requires analysis of them as a whole, not in vertical slices.

The most obvious pool of qualified talent – those who can write reasonably well and have security clearances – are civilian analysts with the Defense Intelligence Agency and their NATO ally equivalents.<sup>11</sup> Some are already on their way to Afghanistan as part of the “civilian surge.”<sup>12</sup> Under our proposal, analysts would train for one week at the COIN Academy in Kabul before beginning work in the field.

### **STABILITY OPERATIONS INFORMATION CENTERS**

Where will these special teams of analysts work? They will form the analytic nucleus of what we are calling Stability Operations Information Centers. (How these Information Centers cooperate with and in some cases replace “Fusion Centers” is something we discuss later in this paper.) The analysts will start their jobs at the Information Centers researching and writing meaty, comprehensive descriptions of pivotal districts throughout the country, after which they will generate periodic updates – every six weeks, ideally – reviewing changes in the overall situation in these districts. District assessments will contain thoroughly and clearly cited references (a rudimentary practice that the US intelligence community has unfortunately drifted away from in recent years). Each paragraph of every report will be kept to the lowest classification level possible. The reports will inevitably incorporate classified data, but unclassified versions of every report will be available.

The other core mission of the Information Centers involves serving as clearinghouses for information gathered from the field. Information Centers will organize and disseminate – proactively and upon request – all reports and data analysts gather from the ground level. Because analysts will be too busy to shoulder this organization and dissemination role alone, they will be augmented by “information brokers” who are focused on storing information and making it available to all elements with a demand for information—including Afghan partners and non-government actors. Through commonly used databases, information brokers will organize and make available the data gathered by analysts.

The information brokerage function does not stop there, however. Until all customers have access to an overarching database, Information Center brokers will take whatever steps are necessary to convey information to customers, including: burning CDs and “air-gapping”

the information to other networks; emailing reports on distribution lists; providing summaries showing the varieties of data collected; and setting up hotlines to answer queries from customers. The Information Centers will each have a Foreign Disclosure Officer whose mission will be to ensure the widest possible dissemination by pushing for the lowest classification. They will also have geospatial analysts who can enter data into mapping software, allowing customers to use Google Earth and military applications to pinpoint local projects, incidents of violence, major landowners’ holdings, and related information.

Visitors to the Information Centers should be able to walk in and obtain mission-related information with ease. Customers would include: Regional commanders and their civilian counterparts; the ISAF Joint Command’s Information Dominance Center and the Joint Intelligence Operations Center in Kabul; partner nations at embassies and PRTs; military task forces; representatives of the Afghan government and security forces; key ministries and agencies of ISAF nations; and private civilians involved in stabilizing and rebuilding Afghanistan.

The benefits of the Information Centers promise to be significant. For the first time, people will have single nodes for obtaining the information they need. Information Centers will provide additional benefits for military task forces and PRTs in the field. Currently, both are deluged with emails, phone calls, and formal “requests for information” from analysts all over the globe. These requests have only increased with the renewed strategic focus on Afghanistan, hindering PRTs and task forces from performing their primary jobs. For example, an analyst may call from Kabul looking for comprehensive information on corruption in Helmand Province; an hour later, another calls from Washington asking for the locations of all cell-phone towers and power-lines in southern Afghanistan. And on it goes. Often, the information that analysts seek is embedded in reports already written by task forces and PRTs, but has been “lost” by higher commands.

Task forces and PRTs simply do not have the time or personnel to play “go fetch” in this manner. Once the Information Centers begin shouldering this burden, PRTs and task forces will only need to deal periodically with a few Information Center analysts rather than the entire intelligence community. The Information Centers, having gathered all available data in each

region, will be the clearinghouse for queries from Kabul and elsewhere.

Units in the field will also benefit from the Information Centers' stores of data covering a broad geographic area. At present, there is no centralized repository for information concerning the thousands of development projects across Afghanistan. Records covering these projects exist, but they are scattered in countless locations. By aggregating even a modest cross section of data on these projects, the Information Centers would provide an invaluable cache of practical information and lessons learned for next-generation project administrators, engineers, and military commanders.

An NGO wanting to build a water well in a village may learn, as we recently did, about some of the surprising risks encountered by others who have attempted the same project. For instance, a foreign-funded well constructed in the center of a village in southern Afghanistan was destroyed – not by the Taliban – but by the village's women. Before, the women had to walk a long distance to draw water from a river, but this was exactly what they wanted. The establishment of a village well deprived them of their only opportunity to gather socially with other women.<sup>13</sup>

Swedish troops operating in northern Afghanistan also found that new wells could create animosities between neighboring tribes by depleting the aquifer in one area in favor of another. This is a problem well known to water engineers the world over, but not necessarily to every executive agency or military commander operating in Afghanistan. The Swedes now repair wells rather than dig new ones. Without the ability to capture this simple history, prosaic as it may be, others are doomed to repeat it. Equally important is the cumulative effect of thousands of other small but important histories and cultural vignettes of this type.

An NGO representative or a civil affairs soldier should be able to contact an Information Center and receive valuable information about topics such as digging wells, the cost of building one kilometer of gravel road, or the best way to administer polio vaccines.<sup>14</sup> Currently, information this basic to a coordinating a successful counterinsurgency literally is inaccessible to the people who need it most. This failure not only jeopardizes an operation, but also exposes international efforts to ridicule for their ineptitude. The demoralizing

ripples of a needless failure, like the buoying ripples of a well-earned success, travel far and wide.

## **INFORMATION AT THE REGIONAL COMMANDS**

The regional commands are the logical level for basing our proposed Stability Operations Information Centers. They have large airfields, making it possible for analysts to travel onward to the various task forces and PRTs. They also provide the connectivity and infrastructure needed for analysts to write their reports and for information brokers to input and disseminate data.

Where, specifically, at the regional commands should Information Centers reside? For Regional Commands South and East, where most international forces are concentrated, the best placement is under the State Department's senior civilian representatives administering development and stability efforts. Information Center analysts would work closely with their counterparts in the regional command intelligence shop (CJ2) and Fusion Centers in order to integrate relevant information about the insurgency into their district assessments. But the Information Center would operate under separate leadership.

Why not combine Information Centers with existing Fusion Centers? There are several reasons this cannot occur in the South or East, at least not in the near term. First, the Fusion Centers do their work in Sensitive Compartmented Information Facilities (SCIF), which are not the sort of venue an Afghan NGO worker or United Nations official can visit casually to exchange knowledge. The Information Centers must have a room where even customers without security clearance can chat with analysts and information brokers over a cup of tea. Second, certain civilian customers valuable to the intelligence-gathering process might decline to associate themselves with lethal targeting – a mission supported by Fusion Centers, but not by Information Centers.

The third and most compelling reason lies in the nature of their intelligence culture. Fusion Centers and CJ2 shops are overwhelmingly focused on “red” activity – concerning the enemy – devoting relatively little effort to “white” activity – the Afghan population, economy, development, and government. This culture is so entrenched that it would inevitably compromise the mission of the new Information Centers. This is

evident from observing the handful of analysts who study “white” activity for the Fusion Centers. Generally assigned short-term projects of limited value, they typically analyze vertical slices of districts rather than holistic organic entities. In effect, their job is to cover the punters and linebackers instead of the whole team.

The candor of this analysis should not be taken as a denigration of the contributions of Fusion Centers in Iraq or Afghanistan. Their overwhelming focus on “red” is a legacy of their mission in Iraq, with good reason and some great results. By assembling small groups of bright, capable individuals under the same roof, Fusion Centers were able to coordinate classified SIGINT and HUMINT, and real-time surveillance video, allowing commanders to “action” the information with airstrikes and special operations that led to the death or capture of notorious terrorists. Al Qaeda’s top terrorist in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, died as the result of a successful Fusion Center mission. The concept has been replicated in Afghanistan and has achieved important successes.

It is the question of balance we are addressing in this report. When General McChrystal took command in Afghanistan in June 2009, he sought to expand the mission of Fusion Centers to provide “white” information in addition to their “red” analyses. Similarly, Lieutenant General Rodriguez, head of the ISAF Joint Command, sought to rectify the imbalance by ordering regional commands to begin answering a wide-ranging list of questions about governance, development, and local populations. His order makes clear that answering these “Host Nation Information Requirements” is a critical priority. Change, however, has come more slowly than the war effort can afford. The intelligence community has been hard pressed to answer Lieutenant General Rodriguez’s full range of requirements. Some intelligence officers contend that “white” topics are not intel’s job but the responsibility of civil affairs and stability staffers – the CJ9. However, CJ9 lacks the analysts, training, and resources to systematically gather, process, and disseminate relevant “white” information.

Redressing this imbalance requires taking the most talented civilian analysts and assigning them a new home and mission in the proposed Stability Operations Information Centers. In the north, west, and capital regions of Afghanistan, Fusion Centers are still nascent enough to be reorganized immediately as Information Centers. Unlike their counterparts in the south and

the east, these Information Centers would be under the direct control of regional commanders rather than civilians, in large part because of differences in the way NATO forces are organized.

It is our firm belief that Fusion Centers should not abandon their mission of finding, fixing, and finishing off key insurgents. At the same time, we assert that any further growth of their “red” missions – particularly in Regional Command South and Regional Command East – would fail to achieve results commensurate with the resources and energy expended. Virtually the only customers for the Fusion Centers’ enemy-centric analyses are special operations forces focused on kill-and-capture missions. We asked numerous individuals working in the PRTs and conventional task forces that make up the majority of the international effort in Afghanistan what they had gained from the Fusion Centers’ labors, and the answer was, simply, “not much.” “I’m not getting data from the Fusion Center that goes into the weeds, per se, and that’s the level of information we need,” said the S-2 officer of one task force, echoing a common refrain. “We don’t need IED network analysis from the Fusion Center,” he added.

To the extent that intensive intelligence analysis pays dividends against IEDs, it appears to occur when analysts are closest to where the problem lies – at the ground level. Even then, the effort seems to have less impact than analysis aimed at exploiting social networks and associated powerbrokers to marginalize insurgents across the board. As an example, one brigade in Regional Command East devoted a robust multi-functional team of intelligence collectors and analysts solely to countering IEDs and without a doubt, they had a positive impact. There was only a 20 percent increase in IEDs in their area, compared to triple-digit percentage increases in IED attacks in neighboring brigade battle spaces. But these results pale in comparison to the experience of 1st Battalion, 5th Marines in Nawa, where they not only saw a zero increase in IED attacks, but experienced a 90 percent decrease in IED activity. The 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment in Nuristan and Kunar, and the 3rd Squadron, 71st Cavalry in Logar experienced comparable drops in violence. This evidence is admittedly anecdotal, but it is not irrelevant. Any comparison of approaches with results this divergent merits investigation and replication of the successful model.

## **CONCLUSION**

The US intelligence community has fallen into the trap of waging an anti-insurgency campaign rather than a counterinsurgency campaign. The difference is not academic. Capturing or killing key mid-level and high-level insurgents – anti-insurgency – is without question a necessary component of successful warfare, but far from sufficient for military success in Afghanistan. Anti-insurgent efforts are, in fact, a secondary task when compared to gaining and exploiting knowledge about the localized contexts of operation and the distinctions between the Taliban and the rest of the Afghan population. There are more than enough analysts in Afghanistan. Too many are simply in the wrong places and assigned to the wrong jobs. It is time to prioritize US intelligence efforts and bring them in line with the war's objectives.

Doing so will require important cultural changes. Analysts must absorb information with the thoroughness of historians, organize it with the skill of librarians, and disseminate it with the zeal of journalists. They must embrace open-source, population-centric information as the lifeblood of their analytical work. They must open their doors to anyone who is willing to exchange information, including Afghans and NGOs as well as the US military and its allies. As General Martin E. Dempsey, commander of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command, recently stated, "...[T]he best information, the most important intelligence, and the context that provides the best understanding come from the bottom up, not from the top down."<sup>15</sup>

Leaders must invest time and energy in selecting the best, most extroverted, and hungriest analysts to serve in Stability Operations Information Centers. These will be among the most challenging and rewarding jobs an analyst could tackle.

The Cold War notion that open-source information is "second class" is a dangerous, outmoded cliché. Lieutenant General Samuel V. Wilson, former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, captured it perfectly: "Ninety percent of intelligence comes from open sources. The other 10 percent, the clandestine work, is just the more dramatic. The real intelligence hero is Sherlock Holmes, not James Bond."<sup>16</sup>

Meaningful change will not occur until commanders at all levels take responsibility for intelligence.

The way to do so is through devising and prioritizing smart, relevant questions – "information requirements" – about the environment as well as the enemy. Of critical importance to the war effort is how a commander orders his or her intelligence apparatus to undertake finite collection, production, and dissemination. "If a commander does not effectively define and prioritize intelligence requirements," Marine Corps doctrine warns, "the entire effort may falter."<sup>17</sup>

The format of intelligence products matters. Commanders who think PowerPoint storyboards and color-coded spreadsheets are adequate for describing the Afghan conflict and its complexities have some soul searching to do. Sufficient knowledge will not come from slides with little more text than a comic strip. Commanders must demand substantive written narratives and analyses from their intel shops and make the time to read them. There are no shortcuts. Microsoft Word, rather than PowerPoint, should be the tool of choice for intelligence professionals in a counterinsurgency.<sup>18</sup>

Employing effective counterinsurgency methods is not an option but a necessity. General McChrystal routinely issues distinct orders and clear guidance on the subject. When he states, "The conflict will be won by persuading the population, not by destroying the enemy," it is not just a slogan, but an expression of his intent. Too much of the intelligence community is deaf to these directions – this must be remedied, and now. The General's message must resonate throughout the entire community – top to bottom.

Historical lessons run the risk of sounding portentous, but disregarding them comes at a high price. History is replete with examples of powerful military forces that lost wars to much weaker opponents because they were inattentive to nuances in their environment. A Russian general who fought for years in Afghanistan cited this as a primary reason for the Soviet Union's failures in the 1980s.<sup>19</sup>

A single-minded obsession with IEDs, while understandable, is inexcusable if it causes commanders to fail to outsmart the insurgency and wrest away the initiative. "A military force, culturally programmed to respond conventionally (and predictably) to insurgent attacks, is akin to the bull that repeatedly charges a matador's cape – only to tire and eventually be defeated by a much weaker opponent," General McChrystal and US Forces-Afghanistan Command

Sergeant Major Michael T. Hall recently wrote.<sup>20</sup> “This is predictable – the bull does what comes naturally. While a conventional approach is instinctive, that behavior is self-defeating.”

The intelligence community – the brains behind the bullish might of military forces – seems much too mesmerized by the red of the Taliban’s cape. If this does not change, success in Afghanistan will depend on the dubious premise that a bull will not tire as quickly as a Russian bear.

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## ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> The CIA’s Center for the Study of Intelligence invited an anthropologist to study the analytic culture of the US intelligence community. One of his observations was: “... [W]ithin the Intelligence Community, more organizational emphasis is placed on secrecy than on effectiveness.” See Rob Johnston, *Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study*, (Washington D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, 2005): 70, at <http://www.fas.org/irp/cia/product/analytic.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The italics are as they appear in the original text, which is contained in Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 2, *Intelligence*, (Secretary of the Navy: 1997) p. 77. US Joint

Doctrine makes the same point, stating, “Intelligence oversight and the production and integration of intelligence in military operations are inherent responsibilities of command.” Joint Publication 2-0, Joint Intelligence (Joint Publications: 22 June 2007) p. I-1.

<sup>3</sup> In this respect, counterinsurgency warfare shares something in common with nuclear war. The strategic, operational, and tactical spheres are compressed to the point where they overlap with one another, so much so that the actions of one soldier, like the detonation of one atomic bomb, can affect all three spheres simultaneously. For a useful discussion on the levels of war, see Secretary of the Navy, MCDP 1, *Warfighting*, (1997): 28-32.

<sup>4</sup> In our view, it is advisable to augment Company Intelligence Support Teams and Company Level Intelligence Cells with trained intel analysts from the battalion S-2 who are in direct support of, but not attached to, the companies. The direct support status protects the analyst from being misused by a company commander while giving the analyst an incentive to provide information to the battalion S-2 and beyond. A succinct discussion of intelligence at the company level can also be found at Major Rod Morgan, “Company Intelligence Support Teams,” *Armor* (July-August 2008): 23-25 & 50. See also LtCol Morgan G. Mann, USMCR & Capt Michael Driscoll, USMCR, “Thoughts Regarding the Company-Level Intelligence Cell,” *Marine Corps Gazette* (June 2009): 28.

<sup>5</sup> First Battalion, Fifth Marines was commanded in Nawa by Lieutenant Colonel William F. McCollough.

<sup>6</sup> A useful analysis of force ratios in counterinsurgencies is contained in the following report: Seth G. Jones, Jeremy M. Wilson, Andrew Rathmell, and K. Jack Riley, *Establishing Law and Order after Conflict* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Our account of the approach of 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment comes from media reports and conversations with Colonel Kolenda. A narrative of the squadron’s approach, including a description of its intelligence focus, is also contained in the book *Stones into Schools: Promoting Peace with Books, Not Bombs, in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, by Greg Mortenson (Viking: 2009) Chapter 12. See also: Kolenda, “Winning Afghanistan at the Community Level,” *Joint Force Quarterly* (Issue 56, 1st Quarter 2010) pp. 25-31. An account of 3rd Squadron, 71st Cavalry achieving a drop in IED attacks by focusing on the population rather than the enemy is related in a brief profile of the squadron’s commander, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas B. Gukeisen, in: Denis D. Gray, “In Afghan War, Officer Flourishes Outside the Box,” *The Associated Press* (20 December 2009).

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of how SIGINT should adapt itself to counterinsurgencies, see Major Matthew Reiley, USMC, “Transforming SIGINT to Fight Irregular Threats,” *American Intelligence Journal* (Winter 2007/2008): 68-72.

<sup>9</sup> A passive approach to intelligence support does not work. Intelligence shops that merely set up a “Request for Information Portal” and wait for customers to fill out formal requests online are not doing their job. Civilians and military officers who need support usually are either unaware of the location of such portals, cannot access them due to bandwidth

constraints, or need to speak with a person via telephone in order to explain and shape the products or collection support they are requesting.

<sup>10</sup> The closest thing to a substantive district-level assessment that we were able to find was produced not by the intelligence community, but by a research team commissioned by the Canadian government to explain the general situation in Kandahar City. This 75-page unclassified product, widely read in Regional Command-South, offers a rough model for the sort of district assessments Information Centers would write. See *District Assessment: Kandahar-city, Kandahar Province* (Commissioned by the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade: November 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Uniformed personnel will also work in the Information Centers. In our experience, however, civilians are on average better trained at analysis and writing than military personnel, who are typically cultivated for leadership and management roles rather than analytical jobs. A frank after-action report by XVIII Airborne Corps underscores how far military intelligence training still must go to make analysts relevant in a counterinsurgency. The following is an excerpt from their report: "Intelligence analytical support to COIN operations requires a higher level of thinking, reasoning, and writing than conventional operations. In general, neither enlisted nor officer personnel were adequately trained to be effective analysts in a COIN environment.... In an overall intelligence staff of 250, CJ2 leadership assessed four or five personnel were capable analysts with an aptitude to put pieces together to form a conclusion." From: *Center for Army Lessons Learned, "06-27 XVIII Airborne Corps/Multi-National CORPS-Iraq."* [https://transnet.act.nato.int/WISE/test/LessonsLea/CALL/TheOIFOEFJ/file/\\_WFS/JIIM%202007%20Gap%20Report%20.pdf](https://transnet.act.nato.int/WISE/test/LessonsLea/CALL/TheOIFOEFJ/file/_WFS/JIIM%202007%20Gap%20Report%20.pdf) (accessed 28 December 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Analysts need not come solely from the intelligence community. People who qualify for a secret clearance, are sociable enough to build good working relationships, disciplined at working with large amounts of information, and can write well should be eligible. Seasoned print journalists who have been laid off in the current industry retrenchment, and who want to serve their country in Afghanistan, might be a source of talent that the State Department or other agencies could consider hiring for year-long assignments.

<sup>13</sup> This instructive vignette, contained in a classified report by the Kandahar Intelligence Fusion Center, is the type of unclassified information that warrants inclusion in intelligence summaries disseminated to a broader audience. See "KIFC/CJ2 WINTER OUTLOOK, SUPPLEMENT III: BUILDING GIRoA CAPACITY" (15 September 2009).

<sup>14</sup> In Afghanistan, which is one of a handful of countries still suffering from polio, there is evidence that using an attenuated live-virus vaccine produces greater benefits than a "killed"-virus vaccine. The excrement of children immunized with the live vaccine contains harmless viral matter that finds its way into well water. Ironically, this "contaminated" water ends up boosting the polio immunity of the community as a whole.

<sup>15</sup> Excerpt from a speech by General Martin E. Dempsey, "Our Army's Campaign of Learning," delivered on 4 October

2009 at the Association of the United States Army's Chapter Presidents' Dinner in Washington, D.C., and published in *Landpower Essay* (Institute of Land Warfare: No. 09-3, November 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Reported by David Reed, "Aspiring to Spying," *The Washington Times*, 14 November 1997, Regional News: 1.

<sup>17</sup> MCDP 2: 77-78.

<sup>18</sup> For an incisive critique of military commanders' appalling abuse of PowerPoint, see: T.X. Hammes, "Dumb-dumb bullets: As a decision-making aid, PowerPoint is a poor tool," (*Armed Forces Journal*: 2009) <http://www.afj.com/2009/07/4061641> (accessed 19 December 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Public comments of LtGen Ruslan Aushev (retired).

<sup>20</sup> Stanley A. McChrystal and Michael T. Hall, "ISAF Commander's Counterinsurgency Guidance," (Headquarters International Security Assistance Force): 2.

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## ***About the Center for a New American Security***

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CNAS is located in Washington, DC, and was established in February 2007 by Co-founders Kurt Campbell and Michele Flournoy. CNAS is a 501c3 tax-exempt nonprofit organization. Its research is non-partisan; CNAS does not take specific policy positions. Accordingly, all views, positions, and conclusions expressed in this publication should be understood to be solely those of the authors.

**NOTES**



## United States Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM) Joint Center for Operational Analysis (JCOA)

# JCOA Products List

(14 December 2009)

This is a list and description of JCOA products. All are, or soon will be, available on SIPRNET at <http://kt.jfcom.smil.mil/jcoa>.

Although some of the products listed below are classified, all of the descriptions herein are unclassified.

### AFGHANISTAN

#### Civilian Casualties in Counterinsurgency (CIVCAS) (2009)

CENTCOM commissioned JCOA to conduct a detailed study of civilian casualty incidents in Afghanistan. This study was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 of the study focused on causal factors in the civilian casualty incident in Farah, Afghanistan on 4 May 2009. This product was completed 24 July 2009. Phase 2 of the study is a comprehensive study of US-caused civilian casualty incidents in Afghanistan between 2007 and mid-2009. These products identify trends and causal factors associated with civilian casualty incidents; they also include DOTMLPF change recommendations for reducing Coalition-caused civilian casualty incidents and improving the Coalition's response to these incidents. Issues dealt with in these products include: challenges in positive identification; capturing civilian casualty 'battle damage assessments'; improving escalation of force incidents; exercising tactical patience; understanding the local environment; conducting 'clear-hold-build' instead of 'clear-and-leave'; moving towards SOF-conventional force collaboration; and conducting the battle for the narrative. These studies are classified.

#### Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) Police Reform Challenges (2008)

This study identifies and documents challenges associated with CSTC-A's organizing, training and equipping of the ANP forces and captures lessons learned associated with transitioning security responsibilities from coalition forces to the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) during a counterinsurgency. Since April 2005, CSTC-A has been tasked to organize, train, and equip the Afghanistan National Police forces. CSTC-A's mission supports Security Sector

Reform for Afghanistan, to counter internal and external threats and ultimately ensure the long term success of the Afghan government. This study is classified.

#### Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) in Afghanistan: An Interagency Assessment (2006)

In October 2005 a team from the US Agency for International Development, the Department of State, and JCOA assessed PRT operations in Afghanistan as part of an effort to distill best practices. The goals of the assessment were to: 1) generate lessons to inform greater cooperation and coordination among various USG departments and agencies in conflict and post-conflict settings, 2) determine key lessons to inform the transition of PRTs to ISAF, and 3) analyze the PRT concept and various implementation approaches to determine their applicability to other current and future US peace and stability operations. This product is unclassified/FOUO.

#### JALLC Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Re-flagging: Lessons Learned from Stage 2 Expansion (2006)

The NATO Joint Analysis Lessons Learned Centre (JALLC) was tasked to: 1) Analyze the relief-in-place of a US PRT—either under NATO control or just prior to NATO assuming the control of the PRT—to another NATO or Non-NATO relieving nation, and 2) Use the PRT located in Herat, Afghanistan as the case study to identify lessons to improve the relief-in place process. This product is classified.

### IRAQ

#### Iraq Information Activities (I2A) (2009)

JCOA identified lessons learned from the planning and execution of various information activities in Iraq from April

2008 to June 2009. We learned that when commanders discussed IO, they referred to an activity beyond the five IO capabilities defined in joint doctrine (MILDEC, OPSEC, PSYOP, CNO, and EW). They were talking instead about the integrated employment of these core IO capabilities, in concert with supporting and related capabilities including public affairs and defense support to public diplomacy, under the larger strategic communications umbrella. Our study, which used this broader concept of IO, focused on four key areas—the recognition of IO as “commanders’ business” used to convey his intent through a purposeful set of ideas and actions intended to both influence and inform; the unity of effort required to synthesize IO policy, doctrine, and the realities on the ground; the operational principles of IO that emerged over time, and the practical and methodological challenges that made assessment of IO difficult. In summary, JCOA observed a growing understanding and appreciation for the decisive role that information and influence played in the Iraqi operational environment, where commanders identified IO as “the most important issue facing the war-fighter today.” We propose that the concept of the “battle for the narrative,” which characterizes today’s IO in Iraq and elsewhere, could provide the framework to align, coordinate, integrate, employ, and organize lethal and non-lethal capabilities for counterinsurgencies and other types of warfare. This study is classified.

### **MNF-I Strategic Communication Best Practices, 2007–2008 (2009)**

In April 2008, at the request of the MNF-I Chief of Staff, the US Joint Forces Command Deputy Director for Strategic Communication undertook a data collection effort to document MNF-I strategic communication best practices and their DOTMLPF implications. That effort culminated in a brief that was disseminated to appropriate customers within the Department of Defense. The JFCOM Joint Center for Operational Analysis (JCOA) reviewed the brief and felt that the recent successes in MNF-I strategic communications needed to be further documented and shared with other combatant commands and joint task forces. This JCOA paper therefore builds upon the foundation laid by the JFCOM Deputy Director for Strategic Communication and presents a further look at the key elements of this good news story. This product is unclassified.

### **A Comprehensive Approach: Iraq Case Study (CAI) (2009)**

GEN Petraeus requested that JCOA capture successes in the Coalition’s integrated counterinsurgency efforts against Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) during 2007–2008 (“Anaconda Strategy”). GEN Odierno and AMB Crocker added that the study should emphasize civil-military cooperation from strategic to tactical levels. This study focused on four main themes: unifying efforts; attacking insurgent networks;

separating the population from the insurgents; and building Government of Iraq capabilities. The study began in September 2008 and continued into 2009. This study has both classified and unclassified products.

### **Joint Tactical Environment (JTE) (2008)**

The JTE study originated from a request by MNF-I to JFCOM to document the innovation in Iraq between air-weapons teams and UAVs during operations in Sadr City. That task expanded to include other urban areas in Iraq and the critical command and control and airspace operations in those urban environments. Ultimately, the JTE mission documented innovation and best practices involving the integration of joint capabilities in urban operations. Specifically, the study was tasked to address four main pillars: C2, Fires, ISR, and Airspace from the joint perspective in an effort to better understand how units in environments such as Sadr City, Basrah, Mosul, and others, employed joint or non-organic capabilities for their specific operational environment. This product is classified.

### **Counterinsurgency Targeting and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (CTI) (2008)**

MNF-I requested this study to capture, document, and validate ISR best practices and lessons learned to improve ISR employment in support of COIN targeting in Iraq. JCOA collected data from almost all brigades, some battalions, and selected companies, in addition to higher echelon headquarters. Team members observed operations, conducted interviews, and collected data to document best practices important to success or failure in COIN targeting. While conducting this study it became clear that ISR support to COIN targeting had to be understood in relation to ISR support to the broader spectrum of COIN missions. This product is classified.

### **Operation Iraqi Freedom Counterinsurgency (COIN) Operations (2007)**

The COIN study examines the shift in focus from reconstruction operations in 2003 to COIN operations (supported by a “surge” of US troops) in 2007. It focuses on the following areas: 1) evolution of US coalition strategy in Iraq, 2) elements of the latest strategy, and 3) impact of implementation of the latest strategy. This product is available in classified and unclassified versions.

### **A Team Approach: Task Force Freedom, Mosul, Iraq (2007)**

This is the story of Task Force Freedom and how teamwork between those conducting operations and those providing intelligence led to success. Task Force Freedom adapted to a severely degraded security situation by developing a streamlined targeting cycle, lowering the threshold of

actionable intelligence, and enabling distributed execution—underpinned by shared awareness and purpose. This product is classified.

### **Emerging Solutions: Al Anbar Best Practice Study (2007)**

This study examines how Al Anbar changed dramatically between autumn 2006 and spring 2007, from one of the most violent, anti-coalition insurgent strongholds to one where local tribal leaders partnered with coalition forces in an effort to defeat Al Qaeda in Iraq. Violence dropped significantly. Reconstruction projects are underway, the economy is resurging, and normalcy is returning. This product is classified.

### **Transition to Sovereignty (2007)**

This study examines OIF from June 2004 to December 2005. This period began when the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) transferred sovereignty to the newly elected Iraq government. During this period the insurgency gained momentum, as it became apparent that the capabilities of other elements of USG could not be brought to bear on the situation because of the deteriorating security situation. This product is classified.

### **Stabilization, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction in a Counterinsurgency (SSTR) [Combined] (2006)**

The Joint Staff and JCOA collected lessons during OIF. Each evaluated SSTR operations from the end of JCCO in May 2003 until the transition to Iraqi sovereignty on 28 June 2004. This publication combines the two efforts to allow the reader to review them in a single document, if desired. This product is classified.

### **Joint Health Service Operations (2005)**

The DOD medical community has had great success in the treatment of combat casualties in Iraq. Combat mortality, defined as a measurement of the percentage of all battle casualties that result in death (Killed in Action + Died of Wounds/Total Battle Casualties), is the lowest level in recorded warfare. Despite the success in the reduction of combat mortality among coalition combat casualties, DOD medical treatment facilities still face many difficult challenges. These medical support challenges are examined in the JCOA medical study. The product is classified.

### **Synchronizing Counter-IED Efforts in Iraq (2005)**

This study examines the challenges of synchronizing and coordination the activities of multiple entities working to counter adversaries' use of improvised explosive devices (IED). This product is classified.

### **Joint Combined Combat Operations (JCCO) (2004)**

This study compiles operational insights gathered during major combat operations and assesses their impact on future joint warfighting at the operational level. It catalogs important findings, puts those findings in context, and outlines the nature of the actions needed to address them. This product is classified.

## **IRREGULAR WARFARE**

### **Sri Lanka: Perspectives on Counterinsurgency Operations (2009)**

In May 2009, the Sri Lankan Military concluded a three-year sustained offensive against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), completely overwhelming the "Tamil Tiger" organization and killing its leader, Vellupillai Prabhakaran. In the wake of this military victory, the Government of Sri Lanka announced its final triumph over Sri Lanka's Tamil insurgency following twenty-six years of bloody civil war and centuries of ethnic conflict between Sri Lanka's Buddhist Sinhalese majority and its Hindu Tamil minority. Sri Lanka's self-proclaimed triumph over the LTTE has left some within the international community wondering if the "Sri Lankan approach" represents a viable, aggressive alternative to less confrontational methods of resolving ethno-religious insurgencies. This JCOA study examines the approaches of Sri Lanka and the LTTE in executing their respective counterinsurgent and insurgent campaigns, and presents conclusions and implications applicable to COIN and IW. This product is classified.

### **2nd Lebanon War: Applied Lessons Learned (2008)**

In 2006 the world watched as Israel responded to the 12 July killing of three Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers and the kidnapping of two additional IDF soldiers by fighters of the Islamic Resistance, the military arm of Hezbollah. Over the course of the next month, Israel struggled to use military force and diplomacy to achieve the goals set out by Prime Minister Olmert. When Israel did not achieve these goals through an aggressive air campaign and subsequent ground invasion of southern Lebanon, many observers began to question Israel's military capabilities. As one officer stated, "Israel has defeated larger Arab armies repeatedly since its creation in 1948. The IDF enjoyed a reputation of invincibility among its Arab neighbors, until last year." What happened? Why? And what are the implications for future conflicts? Many institutions, government agencies, and military services have studied the 2nd Lebanon War. None, however, have reported all the major findings in one holistic account. Using those previous studies as primary data sources, this JCOA

study seeks to identify, synthesize, and present the lessons learned about the hybrid threat that seemed to emerge in the 2nd Lebanon War. This study is classified.

### **Super Empowered Threat (2008)**

A follow-on to the JCOA Techno-Guerilla (TG) and National Response to Biological Contagion (NRBC), Super-Empowered Threat (SET) examines the development of modern terrorist groups and the changes in the asymmetric threat. Work in TG and NRBC demonstrated the exponential increase in the operational and destructive capabilities of small terrorist groups. The threat continues to evolve. Alliances between state sponsors, terrorists groups, organized crime, and trans-national gangs are expanding. Terrorists groups are becoming more sophisticated in their use of commercially available electronic and modern telecommunications networks. Their influence is spreading across the globe while our focus is on the Middle East. The study evaluates the emerging terrorist threat using a law enforcement model analyzing behavioral resolve, operational practicality, and technical feasibility. This product is available classified and unclassified/FOUO.

### **Georgia-Russia Conflict (2008)**

This study, tasked by the Joint Staff and conducted in coordination with EUCOM and several USG agencies, examines the summer 2008 Georgia-Russia conflict in terms of background, conduct of the conflict, and the resulting regional/strategic implications. The analysis highlights direct military action in conventional approaches that at the same time used irregular approaches which shaped this conflict for well over a decade. The study offers an opportunity to see the strengths and weaknesses of a re-emergent Russia, as well as the impact of the evolving nature of hybrid warfare with its impact on policy, plans, and preparations for future conflict. This product is classified.

### **Techno-Guerrilla: The Changing Face of Asymmetric Warfare (2007)**

This study explores the evolution of asymmetric warfare and terrorism. The Techno-Guerrilla is an asymmetric force with conventional techniques and capabilities that utilizes open source warfare ("Wiki Warfare") and systems disruption, as it seeks to create a transnational insurgency. The study examines the phenomenon of super-empowerment—which is defined as the point at which a small group of individuals can create social-network disruption to an entire society with global effect, aka the 9/11 Effect. This product is unclassified/FOUO.

### **Historic Analysis of Lessons Learned from Modern Irregular Warfare (2005)**

This study provides an executive-level lessons learned overview of modern irregular warfare operations. It focuses

on the nature of insurgencies and countering insurgencies, while recognizing that terrorism and intimidation are popular tools for insurgents. This product is unclassified.

## **HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE/ DISASTER RELIEF**

### **International Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Operations (2007)**

The HADR study analyzes four major Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HADR) events: the Haiti Peacekeeping mission (2004), the Indian Ocean Tsunami (2004), the Pakistan Earthquake (2005), and the Guatemala Mudslides (2005). Analysis of these events revealed a number of common enabling capabilities that were critical for success in a HADR response. This product is unclassified/FOUO.

### **Guatemala Disaster Relief: US Response to Hurricane Stan, October 2005 (2006)**

In October 2005 a team of JCOA observers, in conjunction with USSOUTHCOM, conducted a study of JTF-Bravo's quick response in the initial phase of helping the Guatemalan government deal with the devastation caused by Hurricane Stan. This product is unclassified/FOUO.

### **Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief in Pakistan (2006)**

In October 2005 a devastating earthquake caused widespread destruction in northern Pakistan and adjacent areas. In response, CENTCOM designated Expeditionary Support Group One as the Combined Disaster Assistance Command—Pakistan to assist the Pakistani government in recovery efforts. A team from JCOA observed and detailed the effectiveness of US forces in accomplishing the mission and strengthening the strategic ties which bind Pakistan and the US in the global war on terror. This product is unclassified/FOUO.

### **Operation Secure Tomorrow (Haiti), 5 March–30 June 2004 (2005)**

This study focuses on issues that concerned US Southern Command, Combined Joint Task Force-Haiti, and their staffs as US-led multinational forces conducted a transition of military responsibility to the United Nations. The report describes these issues along with others developed through follow-on analyses of data and observations. It catalogs the team's important findings, places those findings in context, and outlines the nature of the actions needed to address shortcomings. This product is classified.

## HOMELAND DEFENSE

### Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA): Applying the Lessons of Hurricane Katrina (2007)

Follow-on to the Hurricane Katrina report, this study develops a framework for analyzing incident management and highlights challenges that affect the level of unmet requirements in a catastrophe. It illustrates ways in which post-Katrina improvements can close the response gap. This product is unclassified/FOUO.

### National Response to Catastrophic Event: Applied Lessons for Consequence Management (2006)

The report and briefing focus on the national response to Hurricane Katrina by local, state, and federal agencies during the month between the storm's formation in the Atlantic Ocean and the post-hurricane stabilization of conditions in the Gulf Coast region. The report concentrates on response—as opposed to disaster mitigation or recovery—because the role of the Department of Defense (DOD) in coping with domestic disasters lies primarily in providing civil authorities with response capabilities, not in providing assets for long-term recovery. This product is unclassified/FOUO.

### National Response to Biological Contagion: Lessons from Pandemic Planning (2006)

Future biotechnology advancements will make it easier for a wide range of adversaries—including terrorist organizations—to launch a biological attack. This product studies biological incidents and examines USNORTHCOM's role as the Global Synchronizer for Pandemic Influenza planning. The study goes beyond the example of Pandemic Influenza to inform decision makers and planners to help mitigate the effects of pandemic or similar biological threats. It identifies gaps and shortfalls in DOD's participation in the nation's preparation and response to a significant pandemic. This product is unclassified/FOUO.

## OTHER PRODUCTS

### Haiti Stabilization Initiative (HSI) Case Study (2009)

Originating in response to a request from the US Ambassador to Haiti through USSOUTHCOM, the Haiti study's purpose is to assess, document lessons learned, and capture best practices of the "comprehensive approach" implementation of the Haiti Stabilization Initiative (HSI). The HSI was a pilot project designed to test and demonstrate a highly integrated civilian stabilization program, funded by DOD Section 1207, and designed and implemented by elements of the US State Department and USAID. The HSI effort was focused

on Cite Soleil, an area of metropolitan Port-au-Prince that was completely lost to Government of Haiti (GOH) control until reclaimed by United Nations Stabilization Mission-Haiti (MINUSTAH) military operations at the beginning of 2007. The study provides insights into whether this approach supported both the SOUTHCOM Theater Security Strategy and AMEMBASSY Haiti's Mission Strategic Plans and has potential wider application in other stability operations. This study is unclassified.

### Going Far, Together: Insights and Recommendations from the United States Joint Forces Command 2009 Lessons Learned Conference (2009)

Today's operations require that military forces work with interagency, nongovernmental, and multinational partners as part of a comprehensive approach. This report summarizes the findings and recommendations from the United States Joint Forces Command 2009 Lessons Learned Conference, hosted by JCOA, held on 17–20 March 2009 in Newport News, Virginia. The conference welcomed participants from the United States and eight partner nations, and its working groups were divided into four focus areas derived from the US National Defense Strategy: Joint Warfighting, Joint Adaptation to Irregular Warfare, Theater Security Cooperation, and Homeland Defense. This product is unclassified/FOUO.

### Comparison and Contrast—9-11 Commission Report/Global War on Terrorism Brief (2005)

This briefing compares the purposes, approaches, and results of the 9-11 Commission Report to JCOA observations. This product is classified.

### Joint Lessons Learned: Kosovo (2004)

This is a combined study by NATO JALLC and USJFCOM Joint Center for Lessons Learned on operations in Kosovo and surrounding regions. This product is classified.

## JCOA-SPONSORED PRODUCTS

### Iraqi Perspectives Project

The Iraqi Perspectives Project (IPP) was a Secretary of Defense directed research project, sponsored by JCOA, and conducted by the Institute for Defense Analysis (IDA) and Joint Advanced Warfighting Program (JAWP). This project examined the perspective of the former Iraqi regime's civilian and military leadership on issues of interest to the US military, using information gathered through interviews and reviews of captured documents. The goal of this project was to determine how US operations were viewed and

understood by the enemy. The following products emerged from this project:

**Mother of All Battles: Saddam Hussein's Strategic Plan for the Persian Gulf War (2008).** Events in this report on the 'Mother of All Battles,' as Saddam designated the 1991 war, are drawn from primary Iraqi sources, including government documents, videos, audiotapes, maps, and photographs captured by U.S. forces in 2003 from the regime's archives and never intended for outsiders eyes. The report is part of a JCOA research project to examine contemporary warfare from the point of view of the adversary's archives and senior leader interviews. Its purpose is to stimulate thoughtful analyses of currently accepted lessons of the first Gulf War. While not a comprehensive history, this balanced Iraqi perspective of events between 1990 and 1991 takes full advantage of unique access to material. This product is unclassified.

**Saddam and the Tribes: Regime Adaptation to Internal Challenges (2007).** This study explores the complex relationship between Saddam's regime and the tribes that lived under it between 1979 and 2003. This product explores the dynamics between tribe and state in dictatorial societies, and the ways in which tribal leadership can impact success or failure of central governance. This product is unclassified/FOUO.

**Saddam and Terrorism: Emerging Insights from Captured Iraqi Documents (2007).** This study uses captured former regime documents to examine the links and motivations behind Saddam Hussein's interactions with regional and global terrorism, including a variety of revolutionary, liberation, nationalist, and Islamic terrorist organizations. This product is classified.

**Iraqi Perspectives Project: A View of Operation Iraqi Freedom from Saddam's Senior Leadership (2006).** This book presents a historical analysis of the forces and motivation that drove our opponent's decisions during Phase III (Mar03-May03) of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM. Through dozens of interviews with senior Iraqi military and political leaders, and by making extensive us of thousands of official Iraqi documents, it substantively examines Saddam Hussein's leadership and its effect on the Iraqi military decision-making process, revealing the inner workings of a closed regime from the insiders' points of view. This product is unclassified.

**Toward an Operational-Level Understanding of Operation Iraqi Freedom (2005).** This

report is the classified report associated with the Iraqi Perspectives Project Book. In addition to providing the Iraqi view of combat operations from early preparation through the collapse of the regime during OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, it also presents the Iraqi understanding of our capabilities and their efforts to exploit that understanding. A classified briefing and audio narrative slide show version is also available for this product. This product is classified.

## **Terrorist Perspectives Project**

The Terrorist Perspective Project (TPP) examines the perspectives of the members of Al Qaeda, and other terrorist groups which share its theology and world view, on issues of interest to the United States military, using primary source information principally gathered through open source and captured enemy documents. The goal of the project was to better "know the enemy" and to develop insights into enemy weaknesses and potential "Blue" strategies.

**The Call to Global Islamic Jihad: The Jihad Manifesto (2008).** US intelligence has identified Abu Musab Al-Suri as the most important theorist of the global Islamic jihad, and considers his manifesto to be the definitive strategic document produced by al Qaida or any jihadi organization in more than a decade. But to Americans, his 1600-page manuscript largely consists of incomprehensible, impenetrable Islamic scholarship. This publication is a distillation of Al-Suri's Call to Global Islamic Resistance. This product is unclassified.

**The Terrorist Perspective Project: Strategic and Operational Views of al Qaida and Associated Movements (2008).** This book synthesizes the perspectives of Osama bin Laden and his fellow Salafi jihadists on how to wage war on their enemies. This product is unclassified.

**The Canons of Jihad: A Terrorists' Perspective of Warfare and Defeating America (2008).** Noting that the best way to understand Salafi jihadists is to ignore statements they release to the West in favor of examining what they say to each other, this book provides a definitive collection of the writings that intellectually underpin the jihadi movement. This product is unclassified.

**Strategic and Operational Perspectives of Al Qaeda and Associated Movements: Phase 1 (2007).** This project approaches Al Qaeda and Associated Movements (AQAM) as a movement rather

than as a network, and tries to understand whether and in what ways its members think above the tactical level. Drawing on the enemy's own words both from open source materials and captured documents, it identifies seams and subjects of concern within the AQAM community. It explores the dichotomy between those members of AQAM who think instrumentally about their war and those who do not, and discuss topics such as the evolution of the enemy's political and military thought, enemy assessments of the United States, their comparative views of their media and our media, and their concerns about attracting people to the movement. This product is unclassified/FOUO.

### **Strategic and Operational Perspectives of Al Qaeda and Associated Movements**

**Phase 2 (2007).** This study draws upon words of AQAM found in captured documents and open-source pronouncements to describe a revolutionary movement which does not think of itself as a network. Intellectual leaders of AQAM are very concerned about the status of this movement, believing that the uncoordinated actions of its members repel the very Muslims that they need to attract. They are also concerned that they are losing the war of ideas and are isolated in an overwhelming hostile media environment. In response, the movement's intellectual leadership engages in a vigorous process of analysis, self-criticism and adaptation. Unfortunately for them, their ability to implement their adaptive policies is imperfect. This product is classified.

### **Voices of the Enemy Quotations from Al-Qaeda and Associated Movements (AQAM) (2007).**

AQAM have been living in a state of war for more than four decades. Salafi jihadist leaders have developed a powerful narrative of history that appeals to and mobilizes their membership, though this narrative is based on questionable historical interpretations and future assumptions. Their strategists have learned that they will need to have a sound strategy and leaders who will ensure that such strategy is followed. The IDA study team used the enemy's own words from more than 250,000 documents from open and classified sources, including documents captured

during OEF and OIF, to illustrate the enemy message for the reader. This product is unclassified/FOUO.

## **Other Sponsored Products**

### **Achieving Unity of Effort: A Case Study of US Government Operations in the Horn of Africa (2007).**

This paper was prepared under the task order Joint Advanced Warfighting Program (JAWP), subtask Global War on Terrorism—Africa, for the United States Joint Forces Command (JFCOM). It helps address two objectives: (1) identify lessons from interagency efforts in the Horn of Africa; and (2) explore national security challenges and interagency collaboration processes and their results. This product is unclassified.

### **UK and US Friendly Fire in Recent Combat Operations (2006).**

The Technical Cooperation Programme - a cooperative venture between Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States - Joint Systems and Analysis Group established Action Group 13 on Fratricide Mitigation with an objective, among others, of collaborative sharing of records, analyses and findings on friendly fire and fratricide. This report presents the results of an event-by-event collaborative comparison of friendly fire records between the UK and the US, covering three recent Coalition warfighting operations: Operation Desert Storm/Granby, Operation Enduring Freedom/Herrick, and Operation Iraqi Freedom/Telic. This product is unclassified.

### **Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) Communications Architecture and Bandwidth Analyses (2005).**

The study characterizes the OIF communications architecture and bandwidth used by USCENTCOM in theatre, including: joint command centers; service component operational and tactical centers; and the last tactical mile, including global reach back. The study covered Joint Combined Combat Operations. It expresses bandwidths in terms of allocated data rate equivalent capacity and performance based on actual usage derived from historical logs. This product is classified.

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